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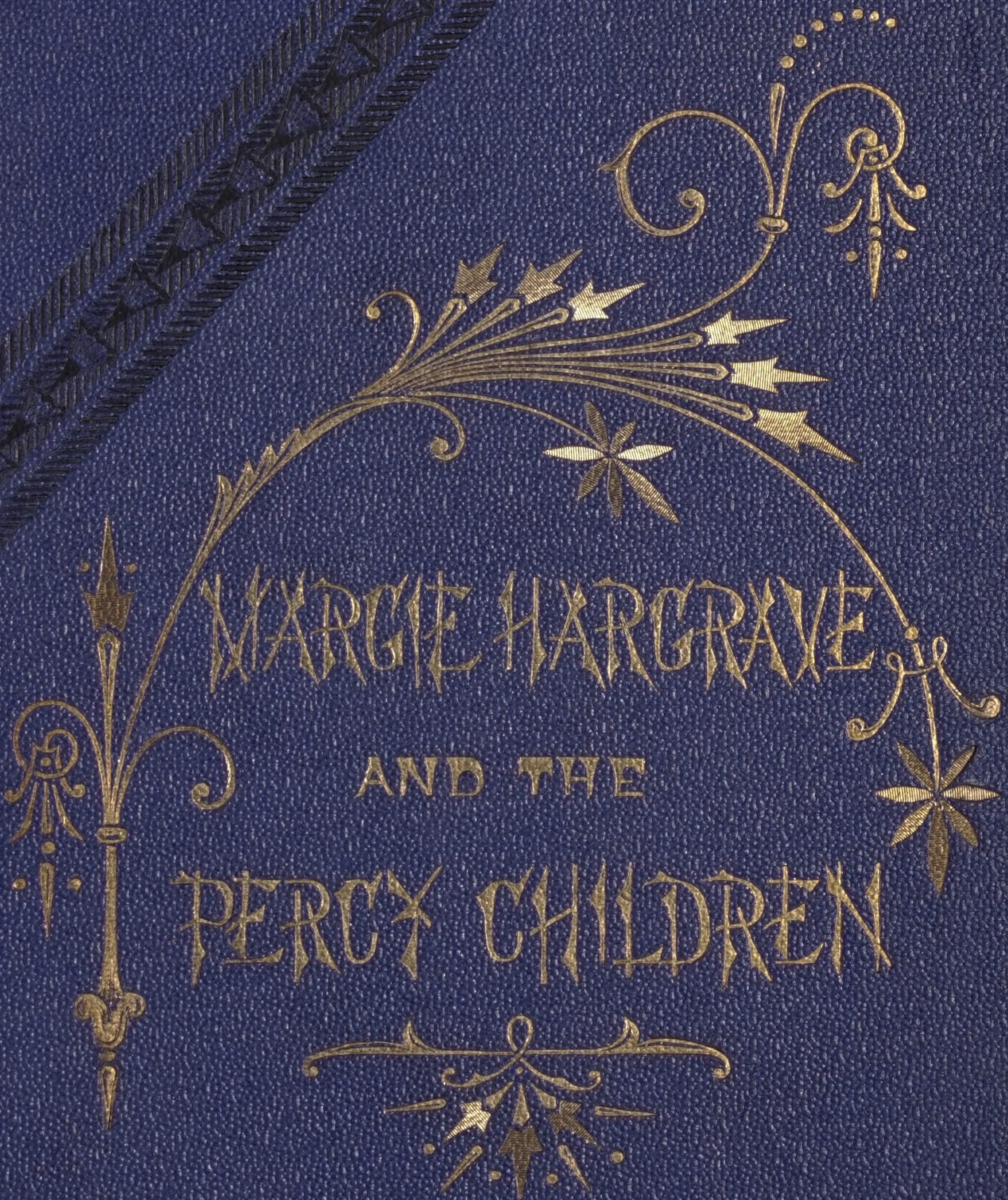

MARGIE HARGRAVE
AND THE
PERCY CHILDREN

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MARGIE HARGRAVE:

AND

THE PERCY CHILDREN.

BY MRS. M. E. C. WYETH.

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MARGIE HARGRAVE.

CHAPTER I.

MARCH WINDS.

IMAGINE a wide kitchen, with an open fireplace in which logs of oak and hickory wood are brightly burning. A plain pine table, freshly scoured, stands in front of the fireplace. Upon it lies an open Bible, with a partly-knitted stocking and a ball of yarn placed upon its divided pages. The lamp in the middle of the table seems hardly needed, for the firelight shines so gayly, lighting every corner of the room, and shedding its cheerful glow upon the children's faces.

Children in this picture? Why not, indeed? On the low cushioned lounge drawn near the chimney-corner lies little Alice curled up like a kitten, watching the glowing embers under the logs. In one corner of the ample fireside, her brown eyes looking troubled to-night, sits Margie, a girl of nine, while opposite her, on a bench just large enough for two, sit the twin boys, Rob and Phil, just twelve years old and the exact image of each other. At the left hand of the chimney-place the door stands ajar, and through the opening a homely face peers into the room, as Aunt Elsie calls out,

"Hab patience, chillens. I 'll be in dar soon 's I smokes one leetle whiff more. Dese yere windy nights 'pears like one pipe don't no ways satisfy."

Do you like the picture? Then listen to the story.

Mr. Hargrave, the father of Rob and Phil, Margie and Alice, had lived in a city nearly all his life. Only a year from the time our story begins, he had bought a farm in South Missouri, and had removed his little family to the low-roofed log-house that they now called home. It was a great change from the nice, well-furnished house on the avenue in the city, but fortune had gone all awry with Mr. Hargrave, of late years, and he was very glad to save enough out of his once large property to buy for himself the little farm in a far-away region, where land was cheap and a living to be had for the tilling of the ground.

The children were ready, as children are, for the change, and the novelty of moving into the country, which they fancied to be a lovely plain, covered with strawberries and hedged in by hills and forests, where roved cows and sheep without number, and where grew blackberries, and grapes, and nuts, in delicious abundance. Mrs. Hargrave, if not so delighted with the change, was yet willing to leave the city and to try the experiment of making a home and a living on a farm; and so, as I said, about a year before the night of our introduction to the family, they had taken possession of the log-house that stood in the middle of the small farm which Mr. Hargrave worked with his own hands. Mrs. Hargrave had her share of the labor too, as all farmers' wives have, and she did the household work, with the exception of the washings, which Aunt Elsie, an old colored woman, who lived not far off, came every week to do. Mrs. Hargrave planned to have her washing done on Wednesdays, so that Aunt Elsie might remain over night with the children, thus affording their parents the pleasure of attending the weekly prayer-meeting that was held in the schoolhouse, about a mile away. Mrs. Hargrave said the prayer-meeting always rested her.

It was Wednesday night, and the washing was snugly folded down in the great round ironing-basket, the supper things were cleared away, and Mr. and Mrs. Hargrave were gone to the distant schoolhouse, when the little circle of children gathered around the pleasant fire, as we saw them in our picture.

It was near the close of the stormy month of March. This year it seemed stormier than ever to the Hargrave children as they gathered nightly round the ingle, and listened to the howling of the winds, the rattling of the loosely-fitting windows, the creaking of the rusty-hinged gates, and the forlorn sound of the leafless branches of the locust-trees as they were tossed against the eaves of the house. Margie and Phil were particularly averse to the voices of the winds, but Rob, who was somewhat of a poet, I should think, was never weary of listening to the grand old choruses of Boreas, old Zero, and the like. To-night, the wind blew in great eddying gusts, gathering force as they came across the farm-sprinkled prairies, and sighing and wailing as they drove on relentlessly toward the distant forest. Margie crouched nearer the fire as each fresh blast swept round the kitchen corner, rattling the little windows that she often declared were too little for any other use than to rattle on stormy nights.

When Elsie put her head in the door, promising to come soon, Margie looked ruefully towards the washroom, and said,

"I don't see why mamma likes to go to meeting on stormy nights. That old schoolhouse door creaks awful, and there's a pane of glass out, and it smokes and everything. I should n't think it would rest her, when she's been starching and sprinkling and everything, all day."

Margie's sentences were not constructed according to the strictest rules of grammar, but I suppose the wind had blown her rules all out of her head, if, indeed, she had ever had them in. Phil understood her meaning, however, without the aid of rules, and answered, according to her model,

"Neither should I: but then, folks a' n't alike. My! Was n't that a screecher? I 'spect our marten-box 'll come down next. One good thing, she's got her woollen hood, and the big brown veil, so she can't hear so plain, and papa always walks either before or behind, or which ever way it blows, so as to break it off. I wish Elsie 'd hurry up."

Phil edged a little closer to Rob, who was whittling a stick, and not seeming to mind the great blow that was going on outside. Certain it was that the wind had not succeeded in scattering Rob's parts of speech, for he looked up, and quite properly requested Phil to move a little farther from his elbow. Phil glanced uneasily towards the washroom door, and rather reluctantly moved a very little.

"Sit over there by Alice," said Rob, "and I 'll tell you what the wind says. Hear that, now?" and Rob, who was a capital mimic, imitated the rise and swell and fall of the blast, as he intoned the words, "*So poor, so poor, oh-oh-oh, o-o, o-o, o-o, so poor. Do n't scorn the p-o-o-o-or.*"

Margie shuddered, and wondered if she ever had scorned the poor. Elsie came in just then, and at that moment a fierce, high gust came shrieking around the corner, and seemed to break right over the farmhouse gable, for it sent a great puff of smoke down the chimney and out at the wide-mouthed fireplace.

"There!" said Rob, his voice coming in surges from his chest, "I heard it just as plain, 'Feed the hungry; warm the freezing. Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'"

"O Rob!" said Margie, "you ought n't. That 's in the Bible. Jesus said that in the Bible."

"I know it," said Rob. "He said it just now, in the wind, too."

Phil looked up as if he did n't quite know what to make of him, but Rob was whittling away in earnest, and neither laughed nor frowned. Presently little Alice spoke from her corner on the lounge:

"There 's another wind, Robbie. What did that say? It seems to speak to us very loud and plain. I 'll 'remember the poor,' and

give my new ten cents to old Jimmy, to-morrow, on account of that last wind."

Old Jimmy was a very poor lame man who lived not far from Mr. Hargrave's, and who made his living by driving teams for the farmers occasionally, and doing little odd jobs when he could get them. He was very infirm, however, and in winter time he often needed the help of the charitable. Little Alice thought of poor old Jimmy at once, when Robby wailed out, "Feed the hungry; warm the freezing;" and she inwardly resolved to obey the voice that Rob said was to be heard in the wind. Alice was Rob's pet sister; and as soon as she spoke, he threw down his stick and said, "Come, sit in Rob's lap and listen to a nice little story, *all* out of the winds." Alice ran to her brother and jumped into his lap; and, with her little clinging arms around his neck, Rob began:

"That 's a fine breeze to start with, now. This is what it says:

"'Pretty near done with sno-o-ow!
Haven't many more weeks to blo-o-ow!
Shouldn't think it would bother you so!
Aren't you sorry to have me go?
Say Good-by to old Zero!'"

"Oh, say another, Robby!" said Alice, laughing gayly. Margie's face looked brighter, too, and Aunt Elsie, seated square in front of the fire, fairly shook with laughter at Rob's droll translation of the March winds.

"Dat a'n't de way *I'se* heerd it, chile," said she. "Dat a'n't de way I'se heerd it. Don't say your way a'n't de bestest, howsomedever."

"What did *you* hear, Aunt Elsie?" asked Phil.

"Oh, g'long, chile," said Elsie. "'T a'n't no kind o' use pesterin' 'bout what I'se heerd. Listen to yer brother."

So Rob went on: "Hark, now, to *that* fine blow!

"'We're most tired of pinching noses,
Stinging ears and nipping toeses.
Guess we'll try some gentle breezes,
Swelling buds out on the treeses,

Opening out the spring-time posies,
Coaxing up the summer roses.
March winds never blow for malice;
We 're good friends to little Alice.' "

They were all laughing by this time, and Phil said the spring *was* coming, sure enough, for he had found a spring-beauty under a heap of leaves in the south pasture.

"And I know where there 's a lot of violets up," said Margie.

"And I know where there 's a lot of apples up," said Rob; "up on the dresser, and I feel like roasting some of them before this jolly fire."

Soon Rob had a nice lot of apples hanging by threads from the mantel and twirling round and round before the open fire. The children, busied in watching their apples roast, forgot the howling winds, and were merrily chatting, when the outer door opened, and their papa and mamma entered the room, none the worse for their long tramp in the blustering gale.

"We are a little late," said Mrs. Hargrave, "but we stopped to see old Jimmy. He was poorly, and your father split some wood for him, and we tidied up the room and made it a little more comfortable. I hope, boys, that you will rise early to-morrow and carry some breakfast to him. I saw nothing in his cupboard but some broken pieces of dry food. I do n't think he can have had a cup of coffee very lately, judging from the looks of his little tin coffeepot."

"Let us go now," cried Rob and Phil. "We can cut across the field in five minutes."

"I 'll go 'long wid 'em," said Elsie, rising and pouring a pitcher of cold coffee into a tin pail which she placed upon some glowing coals. "Dat ar coffee 'll be bilin' by de time I ties up myself in my big shawl."

"Take our roast apples," said Margie and Alice at once.

Mrs. Hargrave made no objection, but began to pack a small basket with bread and meat and butter and a nice applepie. Rob and Phil put on their caps and coats and mittens, and in a minute were ready to start, munching their hot roast apples as they waited for Elsie, who was a little slower in her motions than they.

"Ye see I heerd de Lord's gospel to-night," said Elsie to Mrs. Hargrave. "De winds an' de waves obey him, an' out of de moufs of babes an' sucklins he hab perfected praise. Arter dat ar what Rob heerd in de wind, I could n't sleep a wink ef I did n't tote dis coffee to dat poor lone critter."

"She means that about 'Ye have done it unto me,' in the Bible, you know," said Margie. "Rob heard the winds say it."

Mrs. Hargrave smiled. She knew Rob's way.

When Rob and Phil and Aunt Elsie returned, the stars were shining and the winds had ceased to blow. The cheerful fire seemed to them brighter than ever as they entered the warm kitchen, and repeated to the family old Jimmy's grateful thanks.

"He must have been hearing the winds too," said Phil, "for he said that very same verse to us when we were coming away."

"It's wonderful," said Margie; "it's like being in church in the kitchen and hearing the winds for a minister."

"The winds *are* His ministers," said Mrs. Hargrave; and with that sweet thought in their minds the children went to their beds, and, I doubt not, dreamed pleasant dreams.

CHAPTER II.

SUMMER WORK.

March winds had ceased to blow; April showers had brought May flowers, and May had placed her flowery crown upon the rosy brow of June, and June had covered all the landscape with her beauty, and she too had followed in the vanishing procession of the months.

July had come. The hay was cut, and the golden wheat-fields waved in ripening beauty over Mr. Hargrave's fertile acres. Soon the great mower and reaper would begin to sound its busy *whir-r-r* up and down the fields, and the binders and stookers would follow in its wake, and last would come the stackers and the thrashers, and the harvest would be over.

It was a very busy time on the Hargrave farm. Wheat-harvest is always a busy time with farmers. The farmers' wives have more to do at this season of the year than at other times, for it is the usual custom for the hired men who help the farmers gather in their crops to board in the farmer's family while at work for him.

Mr. Hargrave had engaged four men to help him during harvest, and of course this added greatly to Mrs. Hargrave's cares. It was grand weather for the ripening grain. The sun shone, and the prairie flowers held up their bright faces and tossed their glowing colors to his light, and the tasselling cornfields waved their greenness joyfully. All nature seemed to sing

> "I love the merry, merry sunshine."

Mr. Hargrave's twin boys loved it too. They liked the green fields and the growing grain. They delighted in the summer work of the country. They enjoyed the early morning walk to bring the cows from the distant pasture, and they enjoyed equally the sunset herding of the cattle. They had found the country in many ways far different from what they had fancied it to be before they moved from the city; but I think, on the whole, they were quite satisfied with the beautiful country that God had made. They grew stout and rosy-cheeked, and were as sunburnt, before May was out, as any of the country boys who had lived all their lives under the bright skies and out in the open air.

Margie and Alice liked the new home, but in a milder way than did the boys. They could n't get over their fear of snakes, and were afraid to go very far from the dooryard, or out of the well-beaten cattle-paths. Still they had ventured, more than once, into the meadows to gather flowers and strawberries, and had sometimes rambled in the grove, on the edge of which was built the district schoolhouse, in which they were taught.

On the first of July, however, school closed, and for the next two months the scholars were to have vacation. The boys, for the most part, were to work in the harvest-fields, and the girls to assist about the various duties of the house. In farming communities the school-children do not, as a general thing, go on summer excursions to watering-places during the holidays, as many city children do. I believe they have just about as good a time, though. Their pleasures are simple, but hearty and wholesome. Kissed by the sun, caressed by the breezes, their limbs made active by healthful labor, and their appetite fed by nourishing food, they work and play and sleep and grow as God means children should do.

One morning, early in July, as Mrs. Hargrave stood at the table near the open kitchen window, rolling out pastry, while Margie and Alice were stemming a pan of cherries—for the harvesters were to come to-day, and there was to be much cooking done—Mr Hargrave, passing by the window, stopped to say to his wife that the wheat was in prime condition for harvesting, and that if he got it in the stack as well as he hoped to do, he should feel a hundred per cent. better off than he was last harvest.

Mrs. Hargrave smiled and said, "We have everything for which to be thankful."

"Not everything, mamma," said Margie, as her father passed on to his work. "You forget that we have n't any Sunday-school."

"True," said her mamma, "yet we have the Bible, and *our* dear children, at least, have religious instruction. Yet I, too, wish we might have a Sunday-school."

Now, though there was preaching every Sunday in the district schoolhouse, and a prayer-meeting every Wednesday night, yet there had never been a settled minister of the gospel in that neighborhood. The preaching was done by the pastors of the different churches in the neighboring villages. They had made an arrangement to take turns in keeping up the worship of God in this district, and so, one Sunday, the Baptist minister from the town of W. would conduct divine services; and the next, the Methodist minister did the same, and the next, the Presbyterian from the village of D. preached the gospel, and the next Sunday the Congregational minister from the same village would do his part in the good work. Meantime the Christian people in the community were praying that God would send them the means of building a meetinghouse in which to gather a church. But the farms were few and far between, and most of the people were poor, and the time seemed yet far off, even to the most hopeful, when they should have a place of worship and a pastor.

Ever since the Hargraves had moved to this locality, Margie had longed and prayed for a Sunday-school. She had said little about it, but she had never forgotten to pray that God would provide one.

I think she must have been talking to some of her little friends at the school, however, about her own loved Sunday-school, for she answered her mother, "Yes, mamma, but there are other children who do n't have, and they would like to be taught the Bible and our pretty hymns, and to have nice concerts, and say verses and the Commandments; and I know ten girls who would always come, if we only had a Sunday-school."

"I suppose there are children enough," said Mrs. Hargrave, "but where the teachers are to come from, I can't think."

"Papa and you would be two," began Margie, "and Miss Betty Gaylord, and Mr. Hunt, and—and—"

"Those are all I can possibly think of myself," said Mrs. Hargrave. "It does n't look very encouraging; but we will hope for the best. These fine rich lands must soon be settled, and we will pray God to send us Christian families."

"There 's never even been a Sunday-school missionary here, such as used to come to our city Sunday-school, and tell about visiting destitute places, and starting schools in log-houses, and giving library books, and all that. I wish one would come here."

She did not know that God had already found a Sunday-school missionary, who was to do great things in His name, in that very place, and in that house.

By-and-by dinner-time came, and the hungry harvesters gathered around the well-spread table on the shady porch, and refreshed themselves with Mrs. Hargrave's nicely cooked dinner. After the meal was over, while the men were resting on the porch, Margie asked one, whom the rest called Dike, and with whom she was pretty well acquainted, as he had often worked for Mr. Hargrave before, whether he had ever been to Sunday-school.

"No," said he; "that sort war n't pop'lar whar I was raised."

"Nor any other sort, I guess," whispered Phil to Robbie.

Margie looked disappointed, and the man, noticing it, said, "And what made you take me for a Sunday-school chap?"

"You sing so nice," said Margie, "I 've heard you sing 'Rosalie, the Prairie Flower.'"

"Yes I can sing some," the man replied.

"I wish you could sing Sunday hymns," said Margie.

"Is '*Title clear*' one of 'em?" asked Dike.

"Yes," said Margie slowly, "if you sing it to this tune," and she sang the first verse, with the chorus:

> "I do believe, I now believe,
> That Jesus died for me,
> And on the cross he shed his blood,
> From sin to set me free."

"Well that 's a pretty tune," said Dike; "sing it over again, and I 'll know it perfect by that time. I 'm a master-hand to catch the turn of a tune."

Dike pronounced the word "tune" as if it were spelled *tchewn*, much to Robbie's and Phil's amusement. But Margie did n't notice it, and she sang the verse again, and when she came to the chorus, Dike joined in, and his rich, musical voice rang loud and clear on the prairie breeze as he sang.

" Can you sing 'Come to Jesus,' if I start it for you?" asked Margie, when they had finished—

"When I can read my title clear."

" I reckon," said Dike; " I never heard it, but I 'low I could larn it."

Margie ran into the house for her little hymn-book. Finding the hymn, she gave the book to Dike, and she sang the first verse over twice, by herself. At the beginning of of the second verse, Dike's voice joined in, and Mr. Hargrave and Robbie and Phil, from under the locust-tree, added their voices, and the music sounded so sweet that the tired mother left the unwashed dishes, while she came to the porch-door and united with the rest in the singing of the entire hymn.

" Well now, that 's nice," said the man who owned the mower. " Teach him another one, little miss, can't you? He leads off masterful. We 've got just about ten minutes more of nooning."

So Margie turned over to the hymn,

"Come to the Sunday-school."

And presently Dike had learned that, and all the family again joined in singing,

"Come to the Sunday-school, we really wish you would,
Wont you come and join a class? We 'll surely do you good.
Bright eyes and happy hearts,and voices sweet and clear,
Just walk in and look around, you 'll surely find them here.
Come then, for now 's the time,
Come, in your youthful prime,
Come, while you 're free from crime,
Come, come, come."

Mr. Hargrave sang bass to this, and Mrs. Hargrave alto, and the effect was very pleasing. The men said they enjoyed the singing as well as they had the dinner, and that both were tiptop.

"Now if we only had a Sunday-school, and you would lead the singing, what a good thing that would be," said Margie.

Well," laughed Dike, "I a'n't no ways used to that sort, but, tell you what, *you* git the Sunday-school started, and I 'll make a hand at the singing."

"*Will* you, certain sure?" cried Margie, with sparkling eyes.

"Sure 's I 'm a sinner," called out Dike, who was halfway to the barn.

"I do believe I can," said Margie, half to herself, as she turned to answer her mother's call.

How little she knew what the good God had given her child-hands to do. Only a little nine-year-old girl, and yet she had a work for Jesus.

And in that golden harvest-noon, Margie Hargrave began her summer work.

CHAPTER III.

PLANTING SHARON'S ROSE.

It was quite early in the morning. Mrs. Hargrave was baking gingerbread and cream-cookies for the half-past-nine lunch, which she was to send out to the men in the harvest-field. Alice was rolling out a little bit of cake-dough at one corner of the table, with a clothes-pin for a roller; and Margie was stringing snap-beans for the dinner. She had a large pan of harvest apples to pare for sauce, when the beans should be finished; and then she must wash the potatoes, and silk the corn, and pick over the salad greens.

By the time all these duties were done, she knew it would be time to set the long table for dinner. For Margie knew that between-whiles she must run up stairs and down, and out to the barn and spring-house a good many times, on one errand or another, to save her over-worked mamma from extra steps.

Margie had become quite a useful child. Although in their city home she had seldom seen the inside of the kitchen, yet since she had moved to the farm she had grown very familiar with kitchen-life, and even little Alice had learned to do many things to assist her mother.

To-day, while Margie's fingers worked away at the beans, her thoughts were also busy. She was thinking of her much-loved Sunday-school, and how to get one "started," as Dike said. "It would n't be any use," she thought, "to get the girls and boys together in the schoolhouse, if there were no superintendent and teachers. I do wonder if papa would be superintendent. Mamma and Mr. Hunt and Miss Betty Gaylord would be teachers enough to begin with. Only to begin: maybe after a while some others might be found—Mrs. Nevins, perhaps. As soon as mamma can spare me, I mean to go and ask her."

Margie did n't talk much all the morning, but as soon as dinner was over she got out her little hymn-book, and asked Dike if he wanted to learn "Shining Shore," and "Nearer, my God, to thee!"

Dike did; and the best of it was, that when Dike once learned a hymn so that he could sing it through, he was sure of it, words, tune and all, ever afterwards. That noon he learned both those hymns and the one beginning,

"Not all the blood of beasts,
On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away its stain;"

with the chorus,

"I 'm glad salvation 's free."

Then little Alice would have them all sing her favorite,

"Jesus loves me."

Margie's heart bounded with joyful surprise as Mr. Danvers, the man who owned the machine, asked her to sing again,

"Come to the Sunday-school."

"That e'en a' most made me wish we had a Sunday-school to go to," he said. "I used to teach a class of little girls, when I lived down in York state. Nice school it was we had there. We teachers used to have a sort of conference meeting after school, and study over the lesson for the next Sunday. Beats all, how you do git used to doin' without things you can't have."

"We ought n't to get used to doing without a Sunday-school though," said Margie. "Besides, we *can* have one, if we can only get teachers enough."

"Well, I dunno," said Mr. Danvers; "seems to me all the stiddy meetin' goers might be counted on for teachers; I 'm sure I 'd be willin' to do my part."

Margie clapped her hands.

"Now, papa," she cried, "*wont* you be superintendent?"

"That *is* startling," said Mr. Hargrave, laughing. "Superintendent of *what*, Margie dear?"

"Oh, of our Sunday-school—Dike's, and Mr. Danvers' and mine."

"Dike's and Mr. Danvers' and yours? Well, *that* is enterprising. When are you expecting to open?"

"Next Sunday," said Mr. Danvers promptly, "good a time as any. What 's to hinder? Dike's been practising psalm tunes all morning. It 'll seem like old times to get out our Testaments and read with the children again, 'Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews, for we have seen his star in the East and have come to worship him.' Tell you what, I 'm in for the Sunday-school, and Superintendent Hargrave."

"So am I," said another of the men, who had been silent so far.

"Well, my little girl," said Mr. Hargrave, "I don't see but that you have fairly broken up the fallow ground."

That very afternoon, Margie got leave to call on Mrs. Nevins and Miss Gaylord, and tell them of her pet project. Both were delighted with it, and promised to work hard for a Sunday-school. Miss Gaylord engaged to see Mr Hunt and to visit several families, and ask their coöperation. Margie went home with a happy heart.

Sunday came. The minister read the notices of the usual Wednesday evening prayer-meeting, and of the approaching celebration of the Lord's Supper, and then he paused.

"I have yet another notice," he continued, after a moment, "to which the little ones present are particularly invited to give attention. At three o'clock this afternoon, in this house, we hope to organize a Sunday-school. All the young people, yes, and all the old people, of this community, are urged to be present punctual to the hour. We want to elect a superintendent and some officers, and to consult with each other about the best time for holding the school, and to receive the volunteer offerings of teachers and scholars. I shall be with you on this glad occasion, and thank God that it has fallen to my lot to assist in the pleasant and sacred duty of planting among you, in the hearts of these dear little ones, the fair and fadeless Rose of Sharon."

A little flutter went all over the room, and there were many as bright eyes and bounding hearts as Margie Hargrave's through the congregation. Three o'clock came, and promptly on hand were—guess how many—twenty girls, twelve boys, sixteen young men, and ten heads of families, besides six ladies. Margie was surprised at the goodly turnout. Some friend had brought ten Testaments and a little map of Palestine. Mrs. Hargrave had taken with her a whole year's numbers of *American Messengers* and the *Child's Paper* for free distribution, instead of books, for of course there could be no library yet awhile.

The minister, after shaking hands and holding a brief conversation with each one present, in which he assured every one that he should count on his or her help "*right along*," ascended the little platform and tapped the school-bell. As soon as all were silent he offered a short and earnest prayer for God's blessing and guidance.

Then he called upon the boys present to nominate a man for superintendent. They at once called out the name of Mr. Hargrave.

"Now, girls," said the minister, "*you* may nominate some one, and we will take a vote."

The soft-voiced girls all nominated Mr. Hargrave; and as some one in the edge of the room called out, "And all we outsiders go for Mr. Hargrave, too," it was thought just right to elect the general choice, which was unanimously done.

"Come up, Superintendent Hargrave," said the minister, "and take upon you the duties of office or offices, for I think you may as well be secretary, treasurer, and librarian for the present. All in favor of this arrangement please say "Ay."

Margie was delighted when every one called out "Ay" so cheerily.

Mr. Hargrave then went up to the little platform, and the minister presented him to the newly-organized school, with the remark that if he attended to all four of his offices *well*, he hoped he would prove himself equal in efficient service to any of the teachers.

"And now, dear friends and neighbors," said Mr. Hargrave, "let us open our school by singing a hymn dear to us all, and one that I am sure we all know by heart:

"'Come, thou Fount of every blessing.'"

How earnestly and heartfully they sang it! I am sure they felt the spirit of the words, and at the conclusion Mr. Hargrave said: "We shall now proceed to form our classes and distribute Testaments. I like the responsive reading of the Scriptures, and I want every one who can read to join with me in the lesson for the day."

So ten minutes were allowed for class formation, and then Mr. Hargrave told all to turn to the second chapter of Matthew, which they read responsively.

"Now," said the superintendent, "let us praise God in a service of song. We have a few books here of different sorts; until we can do better, let us do as well as we can. Mr. Haight," said he, addressing Margie's friend, Dike, "if you will be kind enough to teach those of us who do n't know the tune, I think we shall all be glad to learn to sing the hymn, 'Come to Jesus.' That is what we all need to do. It is what all Sunday-school workers wish to do, to come to Jesus, and to bring their pupils with them. I will read one verse. Mr. Haight will sing it alone first; then we will all sing it with him. After that I will read each verse, and Mr. Haight will lead us in the singing."

It was wonderful to see the zeal with which each child entered into this service. After the second verse, most of them sang the hymn as well as if they had heard it sung every Sunday for years, and Mr. Hargrave ventured to carry his fine bass and Mrs. Hargrave sang alto, making the harmony nearly complete. In like manner they sang

> "Hark! what mean those holy voices?"

and

> "Christ was born in Bethlehem."

And then the teachers were requested to spend half an hour in teaching their classes the lesson found in the chapter that had been read.

Margie chanced to be placed in Mr. Danvers' class, with five other little girls near her own age, and her account of his manner of teaching was so interesting that I may, at some future day, be tempted to tell you of it, but not now.

After lessons, Mr. Haight was called upon to teach the school the hymns,

"Come to the Sunday-school,"

and

"Oh, we are volunteers."

And then Mr. Hargrave made a very short speech, in which he called upon every one to use heart and soul and mind and strength in the Sunday-school work. He thanked God for the encouragement he had given them in the beginning of their good work, and he pledged himself to do his best in the blessed cause. "Nothing, dear children, is worth having that does not *cost* us something. Let us bring our offerings to the Sunday-school treasury next Sunday. Let each child try during the week to earn something for the cause. We shall need to buy hymn-books and Bibles and some Scripture texts for our walls; and we shall soon wish to subscribe for some fresh papers, and get some tickets for the infant-class, and these things cost money. Boys, girls, this is *our* Sunday-school, is n't it?"

"Yes, sir!" from a chorus of voices.

"Then *we* must provide for it, that 's all. Do n't forget."

Just then Mr. Danvers arose.

"I just want to say to the little girls, that if they will bring in a nice little pile of nickels and currency next Sunday, I 'll double the size of the pile, whatever it may be, before it goes up to the treasury-box."

"Mr. Haight," said Mr. Hargrave, "I do n't like to be outdone. Wont you go halves with me if I make a similar offer to the boys?"

Dike nodded his head.

"Mr. Haight and I agree to do the same for the boys' contribution," said Mr. Hargrave.

The boys felt like cheering, but they repressed their shouts until a more suitable occasion.

Miss Betty Gaylord walked up to the superintendent's platform and handed him a five-dollar bill: "The new Treasury's seed-penny," she called it. The minister took up his hat, put a dollar-bill in, and forthwith himself went around the room presenting his impromptu contribution-box to all. When he returned to the platform and spread out the collection on the open pages of the large Bible, the sum, added to Miss Gaylord's five dollars, amounted to fourteen dollars and thirty-three cents, several postage-stamps having been thrown in, probably for want of other currency.

Mr. Hargrave requested the minister to ask God's blessing upon the Sunday-school treasury, which he did in an earnest prayer.

Then they sang

"We are coming, blessed Saviour."

And the good minister told them that he should work this week among his people for them, and that he was almost sure he could promise them, on next Sunday, a supply of hymn-books, called "Happy Voices."

The harvest sun was setting as the Hargrave family entered their pleasant home that happy Sunday afternoon.

Margie's summer work was progressing. Do you want to know more of it?

"Lord, thou callest for the workers,
  Glad we come at thy command;
Give to each the worker's portion,
  Loving heart and tender hand.
Great the honor, sweet the duty
  That thy love on us bestows—
In the virgin soil of childhood
  Planting Sharon's fadeless Rose."

CHAPTER IV.

THE LORD OF THE GARDEN.

THE harvest season was over. The wheat was threshed, the hay baled, the corn cut and shocked, and all amid the stubble fields the piping quails kept calling, calling, all through the bright October days,

"Bob White!
Wheat's ripe!
No, not quite!
Yes, 'tis ripe!"

That was the way Robby interpreted the calls of the quails. I guess he knew quail language pretty well.

Along the edge of the timber, the goldenrods and asters bloomed in their beauty of purple and gold, and in the fence corners the crimson leaves of the sumach contrasted with the russet of the withered corn-stalks and the golden foliage of the hickories. The apples from the farm orchards were ready for gathering, and the school-children loved to linger along the narrow lanes that ran through the older orchards, where the hands were already gathering in the fruit. The hazel bushes were bending with their clusters of nuts, and the early persimmons were dropping their luscious sweetness along the roadside each crisp autumnal morning.

Margie and Phil and Robby delighted in the balmy October. Their walks to and from school were among their keenest pleasures. Now and then a squirrel bounded before them, a nut in his little jaws, and skipped up the scaly trunk of a shell-bark. Often, pretty rabbits darted across the road, and whole flocks of quails ran, huddling along, towards the shelter of a screening hedge-row. The prairie and wood flowers were constant inspirations to Robby, who made up all sorts of pretty rhymes for little Alice about the lovely blooms. Happy children were they indeed! Oh, how I wish all children, city-born and bred, could have one year of free, child-life, amid the beautiful and beauty-giving sights and sounds and odors of the country!

The Sunday-school under the care of Mr. Hargrave, throve and flourished. Nearly every family within three miles of the schoolhouse was represented in the work. A nice library had been obtained; some friends in Chicago had sent Mrs. Hargrave a large bottle of liquid slating and a box of colored crayons, and she had taken her large map of Boston, and covered the back of it with the liquid slating, thus making a prime blackboard, upon which every week she found time to draw a picture, illustrative of the Sunday's lesson. Above the picture she always printed, in large letters, the Golden Text for the week.

Mr. Hargrave had prevailed upon all the teachers to come to the weekly prayer-meeting, prepared to remain twenty minutes after meeting, for the study of the Sunday-school lesson. And so both the prayer-meeting and the Sunday-school were the better. And though the books, and the Scripture texts and mottoes for the walls, and the subscription for papers for the little ones, and the *Sunday-School Teacher* for the adults, cost something, yet the people gave cheerfully, and were accordingly blessed in the giving.

One lovely Sunday afternoon, as Mr. Hargrave, with his family, walked across the fields to the distant schoolhouse, he was overtaken by Dike, who was also hastening to the school. Dike had with him a couple of large boys, whom he had induced to attend the Sunday-school for the first time in their lives. He introduced them to Mr. and Mrs. Hargrave, and then, walking briskly forward, he joined Margie, who was a little in advance of the rest of the family.

"Margie," he said, "we 're going to sing 'We 're travelling home to heaven above,' this afternoon."

"Are we?" said Margie simply. She was thinking of some verses she had committed to memory, and did not look up into Dike's face as she usually did when he spoke to her.

They walked on a little way in silence, and then Dike said, "Margie, can't you sing that hymn about 'While you 're young'?"

"Yes," said Margie; "so can you. We sang it last Sunday. Do n't you remember?"

"Yes," said Dike, "but I do n't care about singing it now. *You* sing it. Wont you?"

Margie, without further delay, sang:

"Oh wont you be a Christian while you 're young?
Do n't think it will be better
To delay it until later,
But remember your Creator
While you 're young.

"Oh, wont you love the Saviour while you 're young?
For you, he left his glory,
And embraced a cross so gory;
Wont you heed the melting story
While you 're young?

"Remember, death may find you while you 're young;
For friends are often weeping,
And the stars their watch are keeping
O'er the grassy graves where, sleeping,
Lie the young.

"Oh, walk the path to glory while you 're young;
And Jesus will befriend you,
And from danger will defend you,
And a peace divine will send you,
While you 're young.

"Then wont you be a Christian while you 're young?
Why from the future borrow,
When, ere comes another morrow,
You may weep in endless sorrow,
While you 're young?"

Dike sighed heavily as Margie ended, but all he said was, "Thank you, Margie," and quickening his steps, walked on, and was soon far ahead of all the group.

When Mr. Hargrave opened the school, he thought he felt an unusual solemnity pervading the place. The children were more than ordinarily quiet and attentive, and the teachers, like himself, seemed to be impressed with a spirit of devotion. This feeling appeared to prevail throughout the entire services of the afternoon.

At the dismissal of the school, Mr. Hargrave gave notice that a ten-minute prayer-meeting would then be held, to which all were invited. He was pleased to observe that all present resumed their seats. After a short and earnest prayer, Mr. Hargrave spoke of the great success of this Sunday-school. He compared it to a garden; the scholars, the precious plants; the teachers, the toilers who were set to tend the garden, sowing seed, and watering and training the young opening flowers.

"Who, dear children," he asked, "is the Lord of the garden? Do we want Him to come and visit his plantation? Will he come if we ask him in earnestness? Let us, then, join in the words of this beautiful hymn—the last verse of the hymn—'Planting Sharon's Rose':

"'Wake, O north wind, come, O south wind,
O 'er our garden softly blow,
Bid the Rose's sacred perfume
From our tender plants to flow.
Come, Belovéd! to thy garden,
All its sweets to thee it owes,
Shed thy holy fragrance o'er us,
Sharon's fair and fadeless Rose.'"

The hymn was sung standing. At the close of the singing all sat down but Dike, who remained, standing in his place as leader of the singing, in front of the superintendent's desk. With tears streaming down his face, he said,

"Friends and neighbors, pray for me. I ought to be a Christian. I can't stand it, to get up here Sunday after Sunday, singing, 'Come to Jesus,' and 'I do believe that Jesus died for me,' when all the time my conscience tells me it 's a mean shame that I wont stand up for Jesus, and confess what a great sinner I am, and how much I need to come to him and be washed in his blood most precious. Boys, do n't some of you want the prayers of these Christians? Stand up with me, and let us come to Jesus, *just now.*"

The Baptist minister was present. He rose to his feet, and sang,

"Then stand up for Jesus, whatever befall;
On Calvary's mountain, he stood for us all.
Then stand up for Jesus, stand up for Jesus,
Stand up for Jesus—for Jesus."

While he sang, one after another rose to signify a desire for the prayers of God's people. Oh! what a strengthening of hearts was there among these faithful workers. Amid prayers and tears and hymns of thankful praise, the work of grace began.

The Beloved had come to his garden.

CHAPTER V.

THANKSGIVING.

There were no "melancholy" days that bright October. Summer had died right royally, and Autumn entered on her gorgeous reign clad in glowing robes of purple and crimson and gold, and swayed her sceptre graciously.

The Indian summer came to be the guest of chill November, and her balmy breath warmed the cold cheek of the monarch, before he could gather his wits sufficiently to issue his orders to the rain spirits, and the wind spirits, and the sharp little frost angels, and so it turned out that on account of the presence at court of a goodly guest, the reign of drear November was made beautiful and enjoyable. From the distant fields, the smoke of a hundred legendary campfires floated in a misty canopy above the pavilion of the smiling sovereigns, and through the blue haze the sun rose and set red and glowing over the far-off forest that encircled the rolling prairies, upon whose broad bosom nestled so many farm-homes.

But the Indian summer at length passed silently away, and grim old Boreas rushed on noisy wings to November's court, and begged for orders to blow away all vestige of the purple mist, and at once set to work and stripped the forest of its foliage, whirling the dead leaves in eddying heaps in the ridges and hollows. The ominous sound of his lusty breathing caused the farmers to look well to their wood-piles, lest old Zero follow sharp on Boreas' track and find not a sufficiently warm welcome.

"Prime Thanksgiving weather," the farmers said. "Hens have been busy in the egg business, too—plenty of custards and pumpkin pies this season, boys."

And the cheery matrons were all stoning

raisins, or chopping apples, or boiling cider for the mincemeat, while the children who were too young to go to school hung round the warm, fragrant kitchens, in hopes of securing a shred of citron, or a bit of cinnamon, or some raisins. The boys rose early on the keen, frosty mornings, and hunted and trapped for game; and the girls were contriving dainty ornaments of popcorn chains, and acorn and corn-husk frames for the decoration of the family-rooms, in each of which a long table was to be spread for the feast of Thanksgiving.

At length the glad morning dawned clear and bright, and grateful hearts bounded with joy to welcome the National Feast Day.

There was to be preaching in the morning, in the schoolhouse, and a service of prayer and praise in the evening. In order to attend both of these meetings, the good people of the neighborhood had arranged to have but two meals, the festal dinner to be eaten at four o'clock in the afternoon, for as but few of the families had servants, the labor of the elaborate preparations fell chiefly upon the toiling mothers, who were the very ones who most enjoyed the privileges of worship on these occasions.

As roasted turkeys, and stuffed ducks, and chicken pies, although very enjoyable on the social feast table, are dreadfully unsatisfactory on paper, I will not attempt any description of them; neither of the plum-puddings, or jelly puffs, or floats, or flummery, or any of the marvellous compounds of eggs and cream, and delicate fruits, which the neat-handed matrons had prepared for this festal celebration. The farmers and their families, and work people and guests, gathered around their cheerful tables and enjoyed with thankful hearts the bounties that the great Giver had provided for them, in abundantly blessing the fruits of their year's toil. The merry children ate long after eating ceased to be necessary, and felt uncomfortably thankful—or thankfully uncomfortable; which is it, ye who have tried it? I am afraid some of the adults followed the children's example, or mayhap set the example unto the children, though I don't see why folks need to sin against their stomachs upon Thanksgiving Day, more than upon any other day.

The twilight deepened, and from the little schoolhouse windows twinkled the light of the "tallow-dips," summoning by their cheery signal the people to attend the thankful service. It was a happy and joyous meeting. Sons and daughters and brothers and sisters were there to testify of the Lord's goodness, and to render praise for his infinite mercy to their souls, and to the souls of those dear to them. Fathers thanked God for the conversion of their children, and teachers offered their grateful thanks for the hope of salvation for their scholars. For ever since that solemn Sabbath afternoon, when the Beloved had visited his garden, the showers of heavenly grace had fallen gently but steadily upon the precious spot, and the good seed was yielding fruit, some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred fold.

To these grateful Christians the time seemed not so far off now when this neighborhood might have a house of worship in which to fold the feeble church. "Lord, send us a shepherd to feed our lambs," was the prayer, oft repeated by these heart-warm people of God.

When the meeting drew near its close, Dike arose and said, "Brothers and sisters, I feel like thanking God for the little toilers in the vineyard. I can never forget that it was a little hand that scattered the good seed in the stony furrows of my heart. It was the same little hand that plucked out the tares that sprung up, and were choking out the precious plants of faith, and hope, and love. It was a little hand that led me to the Sunday-school and to Jesus. Oh, let us pray that all the children may be gathered into the blessed service, and made willing toilers, both to scatter seed and to gather in for the harvest."

Then he began the hymn, which I will write down, that all the dear children, who read this story, may learn it.

"Little hands can scatter seed,
Tidings of a Saviour's grace;
In the furrows, in the field,
God will grant it lodging-place.

"Little hands can till the plants,
Plants of faith, and hope, and love;
Saviour, make each plant to grow,
Fair as in the fields above.

"Little hands can pluck the weeds,
Sins of heart, and hand, and tongue,
Choking down the pleasant plants,
That they grow so rank among.

"Little hands can gather in;
When the harvest time is come,
God will garner all the sheaves,
Till we sing the harvest home.

"Jesus, bless the little toilers,
Bless the seed, prepare the soil;
Sowing, tilling, weeding, gathering,
Saviour, bless the children's toil."

Mr. and Mrs. Hargrave returned to their home that festal night with grateful hearts, thinking of the child-faith, and child-prayer and song and labor that had been the blessed means of gathering in their community to the Sunday-school, out of which was now growing a church of God. As they knelt by Margie's little bed, and thanked God for their precious toiler, they prayed that he would give them the heart of a little child to receive his promises, and to continue faithful in the work of the Lord.

Your work, little one, may not be just such a work as was Margie Hargrave's, but it is true that

> "You have a work that no other can do,"

and it may be just as blessed in its results as was Margie's. Then

> "Do it so bravely, so kindly, so well,
> Angels shall hasten the story to tell."

By your sweet temper, and patient kindness, by your cheerful obedience and strict truthfulness, you may be a living epistle to some one who needs sorely to read God's gospel from a faithful child's life. Then resolve to be a little toiler in His vineyard.

> "Dare to do right, dare to be true,
> Jesus, your Saviour, will carry you through;
> City, and mansion, and throne all in sight,
> Can you not dare to be true, and do right?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE CHRISTMAS-TREE.

THE snow lay white and smooth over prairie and field. The sun shone brightly from out the clear, blue sky above the glistening robe in which winter had wrapped the slumbering earth, and that sparkled in the brilliant light with a thousand hues of color. The pleasant farms no longer waved with green herbs and growing grain; but for all that the grain was growing. It is a cheerful saying of a noble woman of Sweden, dear Frederika Bremer, that "there grows much bread in the winter night." So, *under* the snow and under the frozen sod, the wheat that the farmers had sown in the early autumn days was silently but surely growing, growing, and in the harvest that the rolling months were sure to bring, would yield bread that should nourish alike sower and reaper and gleaner.

Within the quiet farm homes busy hands and busy hearts were filled with winter work, for each season brings its duties, and only the drones in the great human hive can ever find a time for idleness. There were few drones in the community among which Mr. Hargrave had cast his lot. Certainly none could be found in his family. Margie and Phil and Robbie found occupation enough out of school-hours to make them enjoy the sweet rest of the long night's healthful sleep.

It was scarcely more than two weeks before Christmas. The Hargraves had always been used to marking this season with festivities. In their city home there was always a Christmas-eve party and a tree loaded with gifts. The children's hearts were full of joyful memories of merry Christmas, and very naturally, with the careless trust of childhood, they looked forward to a Christmas equally rife with pleasures as any of the past had been. To be sure, their mother had mildly reminded them that things were different now, and that even their accustomed holiday pleasures must share the change that had happened to them all.

"We must be content to enjoy many things in memory, some things in hope, and but few things in the possession," she said.

And for the most part they were so content. But what child *can* give up Christmas, the holy Christ-child's day? Margie Hargrave certainly could not.

"We need n't have a grand, surprise Christmas," she said in her wise, womanly way, "but we can do something to make it a happy day." Then she added in a low voice, "But I'd be willing to give up all my home-Christmas if we only could have a Sunday-school Christmas." Margie never forgot her dearest love, you see.

Phil and Robbie shouted with delight at Margie's idea. "Oh yes," cried Phil, "why can't we have a festival with a tree, and presents for everybody? I 'll work for it."

"So 'll I," said Robbie sagely. "I like the shiny nuts, and I 'll take a new book for my share. Let 's coax papa. Wont you coax, too, mamma?"

Mrs. Hargrave laughed and said that she would propose it to their father, and if the friends of the Sunday-school approved it she would do her part towards a festival. Accordingly, at the close of the Wednesday night meeting, Mr. Hargrave invited all the Sunday-school workers to remain a few moments for the consideration of the matter of a festival. Mrs. Hargrave had prepared a proposition showing by what means the enterprise could be carried through without having the burden of it fall too heavily on any one, and yet by which each one should have a due share of the pleasant toil and tribute. Her suggestions were so simple and practical that there arose but few objections, and after a few moments' discussion of the matter, it was resolved that there should be in the schoolhouse, on Christmas eve, a Sunday-school festival.

"So Miss Hargrave 'lows that you can depend on me for the tree, as well as for the setting of it up," said easy Tony Burnett, the only one in the whole community who had the shadow of a claim to the unenviable appellation of drone. "That beats all natur'," he chuckled lazily.

"She ha' n't got acquainted with your natural failin'," slyly suggested a young farmer.

"No need o' makin' her 'quainted with it, then," retorted Tony. "Jes' tell Miss Hargrave I 'll hev that tree sot up firm an' true, nine o'clock in the mornin', sure 's I 'm a downeaster." And true enough, at the appointed time he had a tall, broad-spreading evergreen from the river-bluffs, miles away, planted solidly and true in the middle of the raised platform. Besides this, he had provided a large quantity of branches for decorating purposes; and moreover, upon the gathering of those friends who had agreed to fill and trim the tree, he announced his intention of sticking right along to that job until that schoolhouse looked like an evergreen-bower with wreaths and garlands. Nobody ever before had dreamed how much sprightliness and taste lay dormant in easy-going Tony.

It was wonderful, too, how the gifts poured in as the day wore on. Farmer Goodson, who had never been in the Sunday-school, nor had ever contributed to the cause, surprised every one by driving up towards evening with a large box of oranges, which he had travelled ten miles to purchase.

" I dunno 's I believe in Sunday-schools," he said to Mr. Hargrave as he lifted out the box, " there wa' n't any where I was raised. But I believe in Christmas. My mother always kept Christmas, and I always 'lotted on my Christmas orange; so, as I reckoned there would n't be a great surplus of the fruit in this concern, I hitched up and drove over to Blosville and bought a hundred."

"You must be here to-night to see them distributed," said Mr. Hargrave. "It will pay you to come. You have been very kind and thoughtful in this. A man who loves Christmas and children ought to love Sunday-schools, for their work is to bring all the children to Jesus, the Lord of Christmas."

Dike also had made a journey to Blosville, and had invested the cash contributed by the friends, in colored tapers, liquid bronze, tiny flags, and assorted candies; and while the ladies were busy stringing popcorn and filling the pretty lace stockings with dainties, he had been diligently bronzing pecans, shellbarks, and horsechestnuts.

"There never was such a thing done since this prairie was settled," said an old farmer, who had dropped in about noon with his contribution. "Christmas has always come around regular enough, but nobody ever thought of celebrating it. Tell you what, these Sunday-schools warm up people's hearts, and thaw out a little of that close grip and shabbiness that somehow get hold of hard-working people."

"Thank you for those words," said Mr. Hargrave. "They give me encouragement. Our Sunday-school will have a Christmas blessing, I am sure."

Old and young alike revelled in innocent delight that happy Christmas eve when, gathered in the dear old schoolhouse, they together viewed the huge Christmas-tree glowing with the soft radiance of its hundred tapers, and bearing, oh! such pleasant fruit.

After a short prayer, in which Mr. Hargrave asked the Lord of Christmas to come and bless the children's merrymaking, the various classes marched around the tree, singing, as they went, a Christmas hymn. Then Mr. Hargrave read that sweet story of the Child of Bethlehem, and in a pleasant little address made every one feel something of the peace and goodwill that the first Christmas brought from heaven to earth in the music of angel chorals on the plains of Judea. After more singing by the scholars, other entertaining speeches were made by friends present, and then came what Farmer Goodson pronounced finer than any string of rubies or pearls—and I think he was right, for it was a recitation of words of wisdom that are more precious than rubies, and of truth that is of greater value than pearls: the words of Scripture concerning the birth, the character, and the office of Christ the Lord. After a bountiful supper came the distribution of the gifts, and oh, what a happy time was that! How ever did dear old Grandma Goff manage to knit a pair of soft, warm, crimson mittens for every little child of the infant-class? How ever did *somebody* know how much poor little Mick Brady had longed and longed for a pair of skates? How was it that for Harry Grey, who liked nothing so well as a book, the tree yielded a nice copy of "The Swiss Family Robinson," while for Ned Story it bore the very thing he had for a year craved, namely, a neat, morocco pocketbook? Every whistle, trumpet, microscope, jack-knife, drawing-card, and picturebook, went just to the hands waiting for them, and to the hearts thankful for them, if one could judge from the delighted exclamations of the children. "Oh," cried one, as the parting hour came, "who 'd have thought that Santa Claus could have got such a jolly pack into a house that has no better chimney than an old stovepipe!"

"Hush, Billy," said Margie, "it is n't Santa Claus. Sunday-schools do n't have Santa Claus. They have Jesus, and he do n't need to come down chimneys to bring good gifts to us. He comes into people's hearts and fills them full of 'goodwill to men.'"

As the cheerful groups rode away, under the bright starlight of that happy Christmas eve, there were none who did not realize that the Sunday-school was a holy agency binding each family and each heart upon that beautiful prairie one to another and to God. And it was not the least of Mr. Hargrave's joy to hear Farmer Goodson, as he drove into his farm-gate, shout back, "Good-night, friends. A merry morrow to you all. God bless Christmas. God bless the Sunday-school."

"Amen to that!" shouted Dike in return.

"I knew we should have a Christmas blessing," said Mr. Hargrave. "The Lord of Christmas has been with us. God bless us, every one."

And so there was steadily growing "much bread in the winter night."

THE

PERCY CHILDREN.

THE
PERCY CHILDREN.

CHAPTER I.

A LITTLE SLANG.

HARRY and Lily Percy live in a lovely cottage home in the edge of a Western town. One day last summer their mamma told them to take the baby in his little carriage and amuse him for an hour in the garden. Nothing could have been nicer, for baby was good and the garden was delicious. There they could shout and jump and whistle to their hearts' content. There were no heads to be split with Harry's noise going right through them, unless it might be the cabbage-heads, and they had never said a word against even his wildest war-whoops, or shrillest imitations of the locomotive-whistle. There Lily could skip her rope, toss her ball, or play with shuttlecock and battledore with Harry, for baby loved to lie in his carriage under the willow-tree, and generally he would amuse himself by trying to catch the drooping branches of the tree as the summer breezes gently swayed them almost into his tiny, grasping hands.

Harry and Lily obeyed their mamma, and went out in gay spirits; and placing baby in his favorite nook under the willows, began to amuse themselves in a game of battledore. This went on famously for a while, and baby seemed to enjoy the sight of the darting toy with its gay feathers, and the merry sounds of laughter, as well as the players themselves. But soon Harry, who was thirteen years old, and quite strong, began to deal the unlucky shuttlecock such violent blows that it seemed as if the poor thing would go distracted. It

E.W.

bounded through the air, and up into the apple-tree, and over the garden fence in a frantic manner, and at last away it flew over Lily's battledore, and lodged in the Lawton blackberry patch. Poor Lily scratched her hands and tore a great rent in her new gown with the morning-glory border, of which she was so fond.

Then there arose a little cloud in the sky; not in the sky above, but in the sky within. Lily would n't play. Harry did n't care. He threw himself on the grass and began to toss pebbles up in the air. Lily pinned up the rent in her gown, and pouted a little, and took the baby's carriage and trundled it up and down the garden-walk a few times, and then placed it again under the willow-tree, but this time in such a manner that one wheel was much higher than the other, because it rested on a large clod which Lily had not noticed. Presently she took her rope and began to skip. Just then Harry spied the uneven position of the wheels, and instead of going to set them right himself, he called out to Lily in a very coarse voice,

"I say there, old gal, you 'd better watch out, or that young 'un 'll spill out o' that, and then you 'll catch old Ned, you bet!"

Now was n't that a string of slang for a brother to bawl out to his little sister!

I forgot to tell you that Lily was only ten years old, and according to all proper and popular notions she ought to have been able to look up to her thirteen-year-old brother for an example of kindness and propriety and all manner of goodness. But, as you see, she was n't. I have been around a good deal among real, live boys, and have noticed a good many brothers of thirteen years and over, and under, too. I have often tried to find one like the excellently well-behaved, proper, and pretty-mannered lads that I have read about in books. When I find one of them, I 'll write about him. All the boys I know yet are something like Harry Percy. They have frequent turns of badness. They are often dreadfully rough, and have a shocking tendency toward slang; and altogether they would n't do at all for examples worthy of any little girl's imitation. But for all that, I like boys; I can't help liking them, and would n't help it, if I could. Sometimes they are regular nuisances, I know; but quite as often they are real comforts.

But I must go back to Harry's speech, which was n't much of a comfort to Lily, was it? She did n't think it was, for she retorted promptly, with a toss of the head,

"Oh, I suppose papa has not told you over and over again not to say '*you bet*' and '*watch out!*' And mamma would like to hear you speak so scornfully of the baby and me, would n't she? And as to catching 'Old Ned,' I 'm sure I 'd as lief have Old Ned as Old Harry."

"Now, though Lily's speech had a little twang of piety in the first part, where she administered an implied reminder of their parents' former admonitions, yet the tip of the little speech was like the tip of a poisoned arrow. It would rankle and hurt, and was so tipped because it was *meant* to rankle and hurt. Girls know how to do this sort of thing a vast deal better than boys. *I* think it is quite as hateful as anything that boys do. You see, Lily knew just how Harry felt, and how he resented any punning on his name. Nothing vexed him more than to be called Old Harry. *He* said it was calling him the evil one. So when Lily shot off her venomed little shaft at him, he exclaimed angrily, " You dry up there, you lunatic." The little cloud in the sky had grown to be a great, black storm-cloud, and flashes of angry lightning were coming.

Just here I wish my little readers would stop and take their Testaments, and read the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth verses of the third chapter of the General Epistle of James.

I am very much obliged to those of you who have read the verses. Store them up in your memory, and think about them, and some time I am sure you will thank me for having directed your attention to them.

Lily's eyes flashed as Harry called her a lunatic, and she was about to bestow on him some equally odious name, when, as if thinking of a more satisfactory plan, she primmed up her mouth, and without ceasing her skipping, said in a very injured tone of voice, "Oh, certainly—I 'm a lunatic, and an idiot, and a fool—just as you please. Keep on. 'Do unto others as you 'd have others do to you.'" Then she began to sing in a most aggravating way,

"Shed not a tear o'er your friend's early bier,
When I am gone—when I am gone."

Now was n't that exasperating? Harry thought it was, and just as Lily began the "*When I am gone*" that comes after the line

"Smile when the deep-tolling bell you shall hear,"

he cried out mockingly, "Oh yes, Sister Phœbe, we will; certainly, why not?" and popped a pebble square into her open mouth. Harry would have considered it an excellent shot had the pebble gone no farther, but just have stopped her mouth by stopping *in* her mouth; but, alas, it went farther, and lodged in the windpipe. Ah, what a scene then followed!

CHAPTER II.

WHAT CAME OF IT.

Poor Lily dropped the skipping-rope and threw up her hands, and beat wildly in air, shaking her head and gasping and choking in a most distressing manner. Harry, thoroughly frightened, sprang to his feet, and exclaiming, "O Lily, what 's the matter? Did it go down your throat? Cough! Spit it out! O dear, she 's choking to death! what *shall* I do?" began to call for his mamma and grandma and the hired girl as loud as he could shout. They all came running down the garden walk as fast as they could, for they were terrified by the fright and cries of poor Harry. When they saw Lily's sad condition they were still more alarmed, and the hired girl began to scream and wring her hands, which added to Harry's distress, and he burst out crying. Mrs. Percy laid her hand on Harry's shoulder, and said calmly, though her lips quivered and her face was very pale,

"Be quick, Harry; stop crying. Get the horse—do n't wait to saddle him, and ride as fast as you can for Dr. Burns. Bring him instantly."

Harry flew to obey, and Mrs. Percy and the grandma did all in their power to relieve poor little Lily. But alas, the child's face was already distorted with the pain of suffocation and a livid purple hue was fast overspreading it. Harry darted up the avenue on the swift horse, holding on by mane and halter, for he had not even tarried long enough to put on the bridle. Oh, how he feared that his sister would cease to struggle and gasp before he could reach the doctor. His heart gave a great bound when he saw the welcome countenance of Dr. Burns just opposite their own gate, as he reached the end of the avenue. How eagerly he shouted to him.

"O doctor," he cried, "come quick—

Lily is dying! I shot a pebble down her throat. Her face is turning black."

Dr. Burns did not wait to hear any more, but putting spurs to his easy-going horse, made all haste to reach the spot. He was not one moment too soon. Indeed, he said that if he had been five minutes later he would have been too late. Grandma and mamma held the poor little girl, whose convulsive struggles for air were pitiable to see, while Dr. Burns, with the long, slim instruments which he had at once taken from his saddle-bags, worked at her throat until he succeeded in bringing up the smooth, round pebble, which had caused such suffering. Mrs. Percy cried for joy, and Hetty, the hired girl, caught Lily up in her arms and carried her into the house as if she had been the baby. Poor baby, he had been crying lustily for some minutes, but no one had heeded him. Mrs. Percy now hastened to take the little fellow and quiet him. What was her dismay to find the carriage upset, and the baby with his little face in the grass screaming violently, while tight in his chubby fist he grasped a huge yellow-and-black bumble-bee, which was buzzing and stinging as hard as it could, considering the difficulties of the situation.

"O doctor!" cried the poor frightened mother, "baby is stung. Here is a great bee in his hand. He will go into spasms," and she trembled and turned pale. But the doctor laughed, and said probably the bee might have spasms, but not the baby.

"Caught a Tartar, did n't you, baby?" he said; "and conquered him, too, brave baby!" Then stooping down he spat on the ground where was some fresh, loose garden mould, and of this he mixed a little plaster which he spread over the stung baby palm, while grandma went for some soft linen with which to bind up the smarting hand. Did you ever read of any one else who spat upon the ground and made clay of the spittle? Who was it? Was the clay to put on bee-stings?

Then while Mrs. Percy soothed the baby, who ceased wailing so piteously as soon as the clay plaster touched his little hand, Dr. Burns went into the house to see Lily.

Harry sat forlorn on the doorstep. He did not lift his head as the doctor went by, but turned so as to hear what he should say when he entered the room where Lily was.

"Do you feel better now?" asked the doctor cheerfully.

Harry could not hear Lily's answer, but he heard the doctor say, "Oh, of course, you must take a little medicine and keep quiet for a day or two. It was a narrow escape. Don't stand as target for Master Harry's pebble-practice any more; it's dangerous. Suppose now that I had been up at my office, instead of trotting by here when Harry met me, where do you reckon you would have been now? And how would the big brother have felt to know that he had popped a pebble down his sister's throat, and sent her off into the other world?"

Lily did not answer, but hid her face in the pillows. Harry drew his hat over his eyes and drooped his head still lower. The doctor's questions set them both to thinking.

This was what Lily thought: "Oh, if I *had* died, and gone up to the judgment bar of God, how ever *could* I have told Jesus about my hatefulness to my brother! He would never, never have believed that I ever tried to love Him and keep His commandments."

Harry's thoughts were these: "What if she *had* died, how *would* I have felt to remember as long as ever I lived, that the last words I spoke to her were, that I 'd be glad she was dead;" for he remembered his taunts about "Smile when the deep-tolling bell you shall hear." He shuddered to think of it. Poor children! they were very unhappy.

The next day, when Lily was better and grandma asked them what brought the trouble about, Lily answered evasively, "Oh, we were taking care of baby and playing, and we got to fussing."

"But," persisted grandma, "what started the fussing?"

Harry had been reviewing in his mind the whole progress of the previous day's trouble, and he answered frankly, "A string of slang started the fuss."

"And who started the string of slang?" continued grandma reproachfully,

Harry looked up at Lily, and replied with a twinkle of his merry eyes, "The evil one, I guess." Then he marched across the room, and said, "Forgive me, Lily, and you may call me Old Harry as much as you like; I 'll try not to get mad about it again."

Lily drew Harry down to her, and kissed him, and said, while her cheeks burned with shame, "I was hateful as could be, Harry; but I 'm real sorry; wont you forgive *me?* I 've asked Jesus to forgive me?"

Harry had a twinge of conscience just then, for he *had n't* asked Jesus; but he determined that he would, and they forgave one another, and made up good friends, just as you and your sister and brother have done ever and ever so often.

I should like to finish this chapter by telling you that Harry left off slang in all its forms; but that would n't be entirely true, for he uses more or less every day of his life. I think he often checks himself when he is angry, and tries more and more to rule that unruly member which no man can tame, but which the grace of God *can* tame, even in a boy's heart.

CHAPTER III.

LILY'S MISTAKE.

"I wish I were a cassowary,
In the wilds of Timbuctoo;
Would n't I *eat* a missionary,
Skin and bones, and hymn-book too!"

HARRY PERCY sat in the doorway and grumbled out this very naughty wish, one lovely afternoon. The golden-rods and asters were blooming, the sumac berries were tinged with russet red, the autumn days were in their golden prime, and you might have supposed that an active, healthy, American boy would have preferred being himself, and eating wholesome meals of fresh bread and butter, fruits and milk, in a pleasant home on the prairies of Illinois.

Harry's cap was slouched over his forehead, and his eyes were fixed on the ground, while his hands were busily occupied in twirling his jackknife in the sort of play that boys call mumble-the-peg. Every time the knife failed to turn just as he expected it to, he would growl surlily, "*Consarn the luck!*" You remember that I told you he was not entirely cured of slang, although he had once come so near choking Lily to death with it and a pebble. Then he would grasp the unlucky knife with a twitch and a jerk enough to have set its teeth on edge, if it had any teeth.

Just as he repeated spitefully the very naughty, cannibal desires expressed in the lines, Lily came out upon the doorstep in her pretty, new fall suit and bronze gaiters, and with her long yellow hair hanging down her shoulders from under her jaunty sailor hat, crimped and fluffy, quite in the prevailing style. She looked as fresh and bright and attractive as most little misses do when, fresh from the loving mother-touch, they start out in their pretty adornments of toilet for an afternoon walk. Harry's eyes brightened a little as he looked up at her, drawing on her gloves in the doorway, and I truly think that a few bright, cheery words from Lily's rosy lips, sounding as sweet and bright as the little lady herself, might have charmed away the cannibal spirit from poor Harry, and have caused him to feel quite himself again. But those few sweet words he did not hear.

It happened that Lily was feeling particularly well pleased with herself. She was dressed quite to her mind, for one thing. Everything pleased her; her hair had just the right kinks, her sailor knot just the proper twist, and her gaiters—well, it was really quite exhilarating to Lily to know that just such a pair of gaiter-boots had never yet been seen in that village. For the other thing, Lily was going to spend the afternoon with her Sunday-school teacher. Once a month this good lady held a meeting of her own scholars, with others of different classes who desired to come, and she conducted very interesting religious exercises with these young people. She read portions of Scripture, and sang sweet hymns, and talked affectionately to them about their duties to God and to each other; often she encouraged the little girls to talk and to pray with her. The meetings were always pleasant and instructive. Lily liked to attend them. This day she was particularly anxious to go, for it was the day on which each member brought in her semi-annual contribution for the missionary-box. Lily felt, as she supposed, in a highly proper frame of mind, as who cannot, when from the crown of one's head to the sole of one's foot there is nothing but grace and beauty in the very latest style?

It was not at all surprising, then, that she should be shocked at hearing that boy express himself so savagely inclined towards the Timbuctoo missionary, and that she deemed it her duty to visit the full force of her indignation upon his offending head.

"Harry Percy, you wicked, wicked boy.

Are n't you ashamed to let your angry passions rise in that manner, and all because your poor old grandma asked you to read the 'Missionary Herald' to her? I should think you would esteem it a privilege to be permitted to do some good in the world, especially to read that interesting book to grandma, when she knits all your mittens and things. You 're an ungrateful, hard-hearted, miserable boy, and you ought to know better than to sit and swear at that knife. I shall tell papa. You know there is no such thing as *luck;* and *consarn* is just as bad as swearing. I 'm astonished at you."

"Oh," said Harry mockingly, "I s'pose so. And I s'pose you 're going right straight to prayer-meeting to thank God that you are not such an 'ungrateful, hard-hearted, miserable' girl. You 're just like the Pharisee that stood up in the temple to pray; but I reckon if you 'd been invited to go nutting over to Rocky Point, and had to stay here reading Missionary Heralds, you would n't feel so mighty gay. I just wish mother would come out and say, 'Lily Percy, you conceited girl, come right in and take off that fine rig, and sit down in this chair and read the "Saints' Rest" all this blessed afternoon.' That's what I wish. Guess you'd feel about as pious as I do—that's all."

Lily darted an indignant look at Harry and hastily walked away, as if afraid that Harry's wish might truly come to pass before she got fairly out of the garden walk.

Somehow her frame of mind was less satisfactory than it had been a few moments before. She walked a little slower after she had passed out of the gate, and she tried to fix her attention on the prettily-fitting gloves and dainty gaiters, but both had lost their charm. She kept thinking about the Pharisee in the temple, and wondering if indeed she were like him. Then she wondered how she would have felt, had her mamma really kept her from Miss Soule's meeting. She thought of the nutting party to which she was invited on the next Saturday, and wondered how she would feel if grandma should happen to wish her to stay at home and read the "Missionary Herald."

"I wonder what makes grandma like such pokey books?" she said to herself; and then suddenly recollected that she had chided Harry for not esteeming it a privilege to be permitted to read to her that "interesting" book. She had evidently made a mistake somewhere and somehow, although she was not quite sure of the where and the how. Just here she was startled by the sound of approaching footsteps close behind her. She turned quickly, and saw Harry running with all his might.

"He 's told mamma, and she 's sent for me to come back," thought Lily, and the tears came into her eyes.

"Here, you pious young lady," shouted Harry, "you 've gone off without your handkerchief, and your missionary money all tied up in one corner of it."

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"Is that all?" said Lily, quite relieved.

"Is n't that enough? What are you crying about? Did you think you 'd lost it? Well, you had. You dropped it on the doorstep when you made that slight mistake of calling me a wicked, hard-hearted, ungrateful, miserable boy. At first I thought I 'd let you think you 'd lost it; and then I concluded that was mean, and I 'd better do as I 'd be done by, and not *as I'd been done by*. So here 's your handkerchief."

"*Slight mistake*," repeated Lily. "Oh, Harry, you 're a real good boy, and I 'm as mean as I can be—a hateful, hateful thing," and the big tears dropped upon the dainty little kerchief. "I 've a great mind to go back and read the 'Missionary Herald' to grandma, and let you go nutting. I 'm ashamed to go to the meeting. I do wish I was a better girl."

"Oh, well now," said Harry, "you 're a pretty good girl at most times. Everybody makes mistakes sometimes. Go along to your meeting; never mind me. I can stand the missionary thing, I s'pose, as long as I've got to. Kiss good-by, and do n't be like the Pharisee after you get there;" and away went Harry, his face bright with smiles, while Lily walked on slowly, thinking over her mistake. She knew now just where and how she had made it.

Do you?

CHAPTER IV.

LILY'S TRIALATION.

Mrs. Percy was canning blackberries. There had been a grand neighborhood blackberrying party the day before, and Mrs. Percy's share in the fruits of the excursion came to her in two large tubs, heaped to the brims with luscious berries. She had not accompanied the party herself, but grandma had, and had proved herself a most admirable picker, too. The bushes were loaded, and Harry guessed that, had their party eaten fewer, they might have filled another tub perhaps. The Grahams had filled four.

"Mercy knows they're welcome to 'em," said Margery, the new hired girl. "Half of these will spoil on your hands, and it'll take all the flour in the barrel to bake up t' other half into pies."

"O Margery," said Mrs. Percy, "do n't

undervalue our good folks' day's work in such a fashion. We 'll get up in the morning early, and see if we can't manage to preserve the whole lot for winter use."

And so it came about that from four in the morning until the late dinner hour, Mrs. Percy was occupied with berries and sugar, and tin cans and cement. Grandma, wearied with the previous day's excursion, kept her quiet room, and desired not to be disturbed; so, of course, Lily and baby could not amuse themselves in that accustomed asylum. The seamstress was busied with some dainty material, into which baby's restless hands would persist in plunging, making sad havoc with the delicate fabric, until even that patient little lady uttered an edict that banished both baby and Lily from *her* domains. The kitchen was too hot to be thought of; and the piazza, whereon were mamma, the charcoal furnace, and the fruit arrangements generally, was absolutely forbidden ground from the first. So poor Lily, with her small charge, was limited to a pitiful choice between the sitting-room, cool but lonely, and the garden, which was hot, and moreover brimful of temptations for that riotous baby with the inquiring mind and irrepressible fingers. Lily chose the garden. Luckless choice! for truly it seemed as if baby never accomplished more abundant mischief than on that scorching July day.

"Firstmost," as Lily phrased it in her tearful complaint to Harry at noon, "he ran to the edge of mamma's table on the piazza, just in the minute I was *shooing* Mrs. Maynard's ducks out of our strawberry beds, because somebody 'd left the side gate open, and got hold of a great milk-pan full of sugar and tipped it all over himself. My! you ought to have seen him shut his eyes and catch his breath; but oh! how he did screech when it was all over, and he just sat himself flat down in it all. Of course mamma had to stop everything and wash and dress him; and I got a scolding for leaving him one single minute, because mamma told me not to, and she did n't tell me to drive the ducks out. And then he chewed up ever so much lace ruffles that Miss Lester was sewing on grandma's caps; and I got another scolding just because I was reading 'Robinson Crusoe.' And I had n't more than got him down stairs and into the front yard, before he just toddled right straight up to papa's carnation pink, and snipped off every single blossom close to the head; and then, just because I slapped his hands, he set up the awfullest screaming you ever did hear, and I had to carry him up and down almost an hour, I should say, before he 'd be still, and stop kicking and go to sleep.

"I was just tired out when I got him into his wagon, and all fixed nicely under the pear-tree, in the cool shade, and do n't you think, Dr. Porter's big dog just rose up and gave the dreadfullest howl anybody ever heard, and woke the baby. I do believe that horrid dog did it all on purpose, for he came and sat right in front of our gate, and just howled straight into our yard. I threw a rotten pear at him, and hit him plump in the nose too." added Lily, smiling faintly at the recollection of old Towser's discomfiture. "I was mad as could be," she continued, after a brief pause, "and I trundled baby over to Mrs. Porter's and told the black woman about Towser doing so hateful, and asked her to tie him so that baby could get a chance to sleep. But she said it was n't any use; if he 'd a mind to howl, nobody could hinder him; tying would only make it worse, because somebody was going to die, and just as likely as not it was either baby or me."

"Oh, that 's all nonsense," said Harry. "Of course *somebody 's* going to die. Somebody 's always dying. Anybody that reads the papers knows that much. That old black woman says Towser smells death in the air. I s'pose that 's because he 's a doctor's dog. I hate doctors' dogs. I do n't like doctors either, especially Dr. Porter. I 'm glad he is n't our doctor."

"Well, I wish his old dog would n't come and howl square in front of our gate just when I 'm getting the baby to sleep, and in the midst of so much trouble and *trialation*," said Lily.

"There you go again," cried Harry in sudden indignation. "I mean to tell mamma." And up he jumped from his seat on the doorstep, and ran around to the piazza where Mrs. Percy was sealing the last glass of jelly. She looked heated and very tired, and in no laughing mood certainly, but the laugh would come as Harry ended his rapid record of Lily's troubles with "I do wish she 'd learn to say *either* trial *or* tribulation. She never does get those words straight. She stood up in Sunday-school last Sunday, and just made all the boys in our class laugh with her *trialation*. Do n't you think, she said, 'And not only so, but we glory in *trialation* also, knowing that *trialation* worketh patience.' The superintendent could hardly keep from laughing; but he said the verse over right, and poor Lily never noticed it. She sat down very well satisfied, and never knew what the boys were laughing at."

"Poor Lily," said Mrs. Percy, "I fancy this pot of jelly will sweeten her memories of this sorrowful morning. Take it to her with mamma's love; and read the thirty-third verse of the sixteenth chapter of John to her; and don't be cross. We must help poor sister out of her *trialation*."

"Whew!" said Harry, "I wish *I'd* had *trialation*, if this is the sort of help out of it I'd have got. Wont this be nice on next winter's lunch biscuits!"

CHAPTER V.

LILY'S GOOD CHEER.

HARRY returned to the doorstep where he had left Lily sitting so forlornly. He held the glass of jelly out of sight behind him, and asked eagerly, "Which hand will you have? Choose, right or left?"

"Right," said Lily, brightening a little.

Harry held up an empty right-hand.

"Sho!" said Lily; "what have you got there? I would n't fool anybody so. When I have anything for you I always give it to you."

"Do you?" said Harry, good-naturedly. "Well, this is some *trialation* medicine. Let 's divide. You had the trialation; s'pose you give me the medicine."

Lily looked befogged, and Harry, who had no mind to tease the tired little girl, drew forth his hand and displayed the glass of jelly. "Tribulation jelly, with mamma's love," he said, as he deposited the glass in Lily's outstretched hands, "and I do expect that mamma hopes you will soon grow old enough to learn that there is such a word as *trial*, and such another as *tribulation*, but that there never was and never will be any such word as *trialation*. It sounds ridiculous to hear you say so. You know how you laughed that time that Jimmy Gray said his verse, and the superintendent asked him where he found it, and he stood up so stiff and straight and said out so loud, 'In the Book of Joab.'"

Lily laughed anew at the memory of it.

"Well," said Harry, "it sounded even more curious for you to say *trialation*. Bill Sims kept a-giggling all through Sunday-school about it. Every little while he'd whisper,

"'Bibbles and bubbles and bialations,
Tribbles and troubles and trialations,'

until the teacher heard him, and gave him a lecture."

"Dear me," said Lily, now fully alive to the fact of her blunder, "and is n't there any such word really and truly?"

"There is n't," said Harry. "Tribulation is what you ought to have said. Mamma said I was to read this verse to you," and Harry drew his tiny Testament from his pocket and soon found the 16th chapter of John's gospel, and read the 23d verse: "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." "There," said Harry, drawing a hasty and inconsequent conclusion, "is n't that proof that there is n't such a word? If it had been *trialation*, do n't you s'pose Jesus would have said so?"

"Yes," said Lily, thoughtfully; "but I guess that mamma meant something besides just the correct word. I guess she was thinking of the 'Be of good cheer' part; do n't you?"

"I should n't wonder," said Harry. "You can always *think out* something more than there seems to be at first in almost anything mamma says. Anyway, Jesus said, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation,' so folks may as well make up their minds to that."

"Yes," said Lily, a little gloomily, "especially if there 's a baby to take care of."

"Well, now," said Harry, "I reckon you 'd have more, if there was n't any baby."

"That 's true," said Lily, brightening again; "so I think I 'll take mamma's advice, and be of good cheer."

"It is Jesus' advice," said Harry.

"So it is. But mamma always gives Jesus' advice. She gets all her rules out of the Bible."

Just then the dinner-bell rang. Lily and Harry made haste to put the jar of jelly on that particular shelf of the pantry known as the "children's corner," before taking their places at the table. Margery was just placing a blackberry-pudding upon the sideboard as the children entered the diningroom. Mrs. Percy sat at the head of the table, looking very weary and worn.

"Let me fan you, mamma," said Lily. "You've had tribulations, too, have n't you? Are you sick and tired of the sight of blackberries?"

"Pretty tired of it," answered Mrs. Percy; "but the berries are disposed of, and that's a comfort. If Harry will promise to take good care of baby this afternoon, I shall enjoy a bath and a nap ever and ever so much."

"And if I have trialations," said Harry, roguishly, "shall I get the same sort of medicine as Lily had?"

"I'll take care of baby," said Lily; "I guess I did n't do my best this morning, or else I should n't have had such troubles." Lily felt uncomfortable about the thoughtless speech she had made to Harry about taking care of baby.

"All right," said Harry; "*I'll let you.* Is n't blackberry-pudding and cream just the jolliest dinner? I'm glad I kept at it yesterday. I'd have given out long before I did, only grandma kept on at such a rate, I was bound I 'd pick as long as she did. She beat papa after all, too. She 's a regular major at picking."

Grandma laughed, and said that when she first came to the West, her home was in the midst of a blackberry-thicket, and she used to run out to the bushes and gather berries for meals, just as they were needed; and she supposed that she acquired the habit of picking rapidly because of her great fear of snakes, which abounded there at that time.

"Ugh!" said Lily, "I would n't have gone near the bushes. It seems to me there 's trouble mixed up with everything that 's nice. Even down to blackberries there 's tribulation all the way through."

"Yes," said grandma; "but then we know that 'tribulation worketh patience.'"

"That was in my last Sunday's verse, grandma," said Lily, "only I said *trialation*, and all the boys laughed."

"They could n't help it," said Harry;

"besides, boys laugh at most nothing, anyway. They only want half a chance."

When Lily was alone with baby that afternoon she thought out the meaning that her mamma meant to convey to her in the beautiful words of Jesus, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." "Yes," whispered Lily to herself, "Jesus has overcome the world, and he is strong enough to help *me* to overcome. He will *give* me the victory. Though I have ever so much tribulation, I shall overcome it all, if I love and trust him."

And in this sweet faith, as Lily trundled the baby up and down the garden paths, she was indeed "of good cheer."

CHAPTER VI.

HARRY'S EXCURSION.

Grandma Gerry lived in the woods, about three miles over the hills that bounded the pretty valley in which Harry and Lily lived, in the pleasant town of B.

Everybody in the town knew Grandma Gerry. She was "grandma" to every one of the town people, and all of them held the good old lady in the highest esteem. She lived, when at home, in the very heart of a tract of timber known as Payson's Woods. For the greater part of the way from the town to her little loghouse a good country road skirted the hills. For the remainder of the route, however, travellers were obliged to take the cowpath which led directly through the tract, or else to go by the country road which made the journey a good mile longer. The town children always took the cowpath over the hills and down along the windings of the creek. There was no end of attractions for young eyes along the path to Grandma Gerry's, and frequently were the green hills and greener creek-sides made lively with the echoes of children's voices, shouting, whistling, laughing, and hurrahing, as the merry-hearted owners sped along on their various errands to the loghouse in the timber.

Grandma Gerry was a useful member of B—— society. The socks she has knitted for the old men, and the mittens she has netted for the little boys, the pantaloons and vests she has made, and the warm, soft comforts she has tacked and quilted for the young and old alike of the families of B——, could testify to the usefulness of this lonely dweller in the little loghouse at Payson's Woods.

Now, though Grandma Gerry was "grandma" to all the townsfolk, yet not a single blood-relative had she alive in all the world. She was the last of her line; her kinsfolk were all gone.

Do you fancy that she was a gloomy, mournful-looking old lady, because she had outlived her family, and was left alone in the house in the woods, and had to sew and knit and go out nursing for her living? You are mistaken, if you do. Not a cheerier, sunnier temper could be found in all B—— than that which shone out of grandma's soft brown eyes, and made music in her gentle, pleasant voice. Oh, how the children loved her! How they danced and clapped their hands when she came to their homes to sew or may be to nurse some sick one! Such famous stories as she could tell, such dainty dishes as she could prepare, always with an extra taste which the well ones could so keenly relish.

But I shall never come to Harry's excursion if I go rambling on at this rate about Grandma Gerry. I must begin now, where I ought to have begun at first, and where every good story-teller should begin—at the beginning: and that was where Mrs. Percy stood in the door of her pretty cottage, and called to Harry and Lily, who were picking flowers for the fresh bouquet that very morning they gathered for their mamma's sitting-room, and said, "Harry, how would you like to go on an excursion to Payson's Woods?"

"Firstrate!" shouted Harry, waving his nosegay above his head. "How long may I stay?"

"All day, if grandma does n't object," answered his mother. "Lily may go, too, if she likes."

Of course Lily liked. She fairly danced among the flower-beds at the prospect. "Good! good!" she exclaimed. "We have n't been out to grandma's since strawberries were in bloom; and here it is blackberry time."

Lily always reckoned time much as Paul and Virginia did—by the seasons of flowers and fruits, and not by the mere empty names of the months.

Mrs. Percy had a bundle of work for

Harry to take to Grandma Gerry, with a note containing all the necessary directions. Then Grandma Percy intrusted to Lily's care a tiny bandbox, in which was the daintiest and whitest of caps, a real widow's cap, such as Grandma Gerry always wore, with a white crape border and broad black ribbon. This was a present from Lily's own grandma to Grandma Gerry.

"That would be a nice cap," said Harry, "if it only had some brighter ribbons. Pink would go well with grandma's black eyes."

"Her eyes are brown," said Lily.

"Well, brown, then. Why do n't you put a pink ribbon on it, or anyway some pink flowers, like Mrs. Dempster's?" persisted Harry, laying a lovely pink rosebud on one side of the cap, as he spoke. "There! see how nice that looks," he said.

"Old women do n't wear pink rosebuds, Harry," said his grandma.

"Mrs. Dempster does," said Harry, "lots of 'em. And she 's old."

"Yes," said grandma, "but she is n't a widow. And the Linns were always dressy. I suppose Major Dempster likes to have her dress just as she always has. She has n't seen much trouble. Grandma Gerry and I have grown past rosebuds and pink ribbons, I think."

"Well, I 'm going to try an experiment, anyhow," said Harry decidedly; "see if I do n't. I 'm going to pick a bouquet for grandma this minute."

In a short time, with bundle, bandbox, and bouquet, the children set off on their excursion to Payson's Woods. The hillsides were fragrant with the breath of summer, the day was fine, a delicious west wind was gently swaying the long grasses of the meadows and stirring the branches of the shadowy trees, the birds were singing gayly, and butterflies of every hue and size were flitting in the bright sunshine. Along the creek all manner of lovely water-grasses and ferns and mosses grew, and trailing vines hung all along the fringing alders and willows that lined the creek's edge. Harry whittled a boat, with a mast and rudder, and launched it on the rippling stream. He had a long, supple branch of elder with which he guided his little bark, and freed it from obstructions into which the shifting current sometimes drifted it. It sailed along so gallantly that Harry wished he had a flag for it, and even went so far as to propose snipping off one end of grandma's cap-ribbon for that purpose.

"That would be stealing!" said Lily in horror.

"Well," laughed Harry, "that 's what pirates do. If she hoisted a black flag, she 'd be a pirate ship. Do n't you know that? I hate that black ribbon on grandma's hat. I wish she 'd take it off and put on a nice pink one, do n't you?"

Lily, who was a great stickler for the proprieties, answered that widows always wore black ribbons or crape, or "something awful sorrowful-looking;" and Grandma Gerry was just as good a widow as anybody, if she did live all by herself, and she did n't see why she should n't have proper widow's trimming.

Harry, being only a boy, failed to appreciate this line of argument, and answered with a contemptuous "Pooh! Grandma Gerry do n't ever look awful sorrowful. Do you s'pose I 'd be going to spend the day with her if she did? I like her because she 's gay and nice and tells such funny stories, and sings, 'The frog, he would a-wooing go.' Oh, but that would make a cat laugh." And Harry began to laugh himself at the remembrance of the many entertaining diversions that this dear old lady had afforded him. While he was indulging in his laugh a swirling eddy carried the boat between two large stones, and she lost both rudder and mast.

"There she goes!" cried Harry. "She 's struck on the breakers. She 's a total wreck!"

"I 'm glad of it," said Lily. "I did n't like her any more after you thought about stealing the cap-ribbons to make a pirate flag."

"Pho!" cried Harry, "I was only in fun. Can't you take a joke?"

"Mamma says it 's wrong to joke about sins," said Lily. "Besides, I believe you *would* have cut off a piece, if—"

"Now, you Lily Percy!" cried Harry, flushing up, "you 'd better call me a thief!"

And there was every symptom of a storm arising, one of those storms *from within*, you know, to destroy the pleasure of the excursion; and there is no telling how all this might have ended, had not at this moment a cheery voice close by called out,

"Why, bless the dear children! If here are n't Lily and Harry come to help grandma gather greens for her dinner."

And there, sure enough, was grandma herself, with her shaker bonnet and her little willow basket, come out to search for cresses and young mustard and sour-dock and crisp, tender lambs'-quarters, for greens. Harry

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forgot his indignation and Lily her suspicions, and both ran to meet the smiling old lady, and to tell the errand on which they came.

"You 'll find out what my experiment is when we take out that cap," whispered Harry to Lily.

But as the greens are to be picked before that time, I see clearly that this part of the story will have to be told in another chapter.

CHAPTER VII.

HARRY'S EXPERIMENT.

What with Grandma Gerry's questions about home folks and home affairs, and Lily's and Harry's answers, and the children's voluntary rehearsals of all the news of the town that then and there occurred to their minds while plucking the fresh young shoots of such growing plants as grandma designated, the basket was soon filled, and the trio proceeded along the narrow path that led from the creek side into the deep woods. Just in in the midst of the forest was a small cleared space, comprising an acre or two, surrounded by a low picket fence, and in the centre of this enclosure, nestled among fruit-trees, stood grandma's little home, a small house built of logs, and quite overrun with tangled, climbing vines. Woodbine, trumpet-creeper, honeysuckle, and sweet-brier all grew and clung together, and made beautiful the lowly cottage.

Outside the window hung the canary's cage, and the little warbler was trilling forth his finest notes when Lily and Harry arrived at the wicket gate. Chained to a limb of the door-yard apple-tree sat Polly, grandma's pet parrot. She hopped upon one leg and looked knowingly, for a wise parrot was Polly, first at Lily and then at Harry. Then, perching herself on a low limb, she called out in shrill tones, "Back again, grandma? Got anything for Poll?"

Lily had a jumble in her pocket, which she offered. Polly, before tasting it, briskly acknowledged the favor by screaming, "Thankee, miss; thankee, ma'am. Polly loves good girls and boys. Polly loves grandma." Then she nibbled a bite from the jumble, and hopping again to the grass-plat, stood on one leg again, and turning her head up drolly, said in her shrillest tones, "Tell ye a secret. Can't ye guess it? Grandma's got company!"

"Indeed!" said grandma. "And was Polly well-mannered? What did she say to grandma's company?"

"Good Polly!" said the bird, stroking her feathers complacently. "'Take a seat, sir. Wipe your feet, sir.'"

"It's the minister," said Lily; "I see him sitting by the back window."

Then they went in with grandma and greeted Dr. Williston, who had come to make a call, and who was so well used to Polly's ways that he knew grandma could not be far off, and would soon be back, else Polly would not have told him to take a seat, but would rather have screamed out "Grandma's gone. Polly's all alone."

There was not a man in all B—— with whom the children were on better terms than with their dear minister. He was as popular with them all as was grandma herself. After cordially saluting grandma and her little guests, the doctor reseated himself by the window that opened out upon the grassy bleaching plat and the neat garden spot. In one corner of this grass plat, under a fringe of swamp willows, bubbled up a living spring of cool, sweet water. Lily filled two glasses with the sparkling water, and brought them to grandma and the minister.

"While sitting here waiting for grandma," said Dr. Williston, as he thanked Lily for the sweet draught, "I have been thinking out my sermon for next Sunday; and I found my text in that cool, fresh, never-failing spring out there among the willows."

"I can guess it," said Harry: 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.'"

"No," said the doctor. "The words of my text were spoken by the same prophet, however."

"Then they're in Isaiah," said Lily thoughtfully. "Is it, 'I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water'?"

The pastor smiled, but shook his head. "See," he said, "the fringe of willows edging the stream that trickles away amid the moist grasses. I said I found my text in the spring: but in my text may be found not only the spring itself, but also the grass, the willows, and the little trickling brook. This is the text: 'I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring; and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses.' The living spring there beneath the willows, freshening and quickening and blessing all about it, is like God's Spirit poured out upon the hearts of his children, causing all about them to receive healthful blessing from it."

"That 'll be *our* sermon especially, Grandma," said Lily delightedly, "because we know the text first."

Grandma said it would be as good as two sermons to her, for she should be thinking over it all the week beforehand. She should not go to the spring, or look out at the willows or the trickling brook, without thinking of the blessed promise.

"I've found it," cried Harry, who had been turning the leaves of the big Bible. "It is in the forty-fourth chapter of Isaiah, and it's part of the third and all of the fourth verse."

Perhaps some people would think it undignified for a minister to talk so freely of his sermon thoughts, and even to tell his text beforehand, to little children too. Maybe it was; but then Dr. Williston did n't think much of dignity, and did think a great deal of little folks and their love.

Lily had put the bouquet they had brought to grandma in some water, and was just about placing it on the dresser, when Harry exclaimed, "Oh, if you please, I'll take a nice rosebud out of that posy." Then turning to the old lady, he said, "Grandma, I picked this rosebud on purpose for you to wear in your new cap that my grandma has sent you. She says you are too old to want pink ribbons and rosebuds; but I do n't think so, and I 'd like to try the experiment. I suppose we can't change that horrid black ribbon, but you 'll wear this rosebud in it to-day, wont you?"

And Harry twirled the cap which Lily had taken from the box on the fingers of one hand, while with the other he sought a fit place on which to pin the bud that he held between his teeth.

Grandma and the doctor laughed heartily at Harry's frank expression of his opinion, and grandma said she quite agreed with Grandma Percy about an old woman like her wanting pink rosebuds. "Rosebuds are for youth and beauty," said the old lady.

"*This* rosebud is for Grandma Gerry and beauty," said Harry as emphatically as he could with his shut teeth. Then going up to Dr. Williston, he pointed to one side of the cap, and said, "There 's a good place. Wont you please pin it on?" And the good doctor, saying that he was on Harry's side of the question, actually pinned the rosebud into the fair white border of the cap, and begged grandma to wear it there for that day at least.

"Let me brush your hair and put the cap on; may I, Grandma?" asked Lily. And while she smoothed the shining silvery locks from the old lady's forehead, and arranged the cap, and tied the ribbons in a tasteful bow, Harry, leaning against the doctor's shoulder, with that good man's arm around him, commented on the exceeding fitness of just such a rosebud for just such a face as grandma's.

"Our boy has a fit sense of the beautiful," said the minister, giving Harry a little hug. "You 'll wear it, wont you, to please him—and me?"

"And me!" added Lily. "It does n't look a bit gaudy. I thought maybe it might; I was a little doubtful; but it does n't; it 's just sweet. It makes *me* think of a text too," said Lily softly: "'I am the Rose of Sharon.'"

"Yes, dear," said grandma, smiling, "I'll wear it all day; and when it withers I'll lay it away among my treasures, and whenever I look at it, it will remind me of my dear children and of my pastor, and better than all, of that precious Rose of Sharon that blooms for all of us, and shall never fade."

Grandma arose, and laying the cap she had worn before in the little bandbox, took up the basket of greens to carry them into the next room.

"Give me a pan, Grandma," said Lily, "and Harry and I will pick them for you."

"And we can enjoy a singing service at the same time," said the good pastor.

"Delightful!" said grandma, hastening back with the pan and the greens.

"Now," said the doctor, "let us sing four hymns. Each choose one, beginning with the youngest. Lily, it's your first choice."

Lily chose, "Saviour, like a shepherd lead us." Then Harry chose "Children of the Heavenly King"—a hymn which grandma said it always did her heart good to hear.

When they had sung these, Dr. Williston chose "Hark, my soul, it is the Lord." And last of all, grandma chose "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord."

Harry and Lily had fine voices, and were good singers; and as they were quite familiar with the words, the singing was something pleasant to hear. Grandma wiped away the tears of gratitude from her eyes more than once during the tuneful service; Lily and Harry and the minister looked as happy as they could be; the canary at the door trilled his rarest accompaniment; and the rosebud in the snowy cap border at grandma's cheek never once thought of withering.

"Now I must go," said Dr. Williston, rising. "Have n't we had a nice visit, children? and do n't we enjoy Grandma Gerry and her dear little wildwood home?"

"Yes, indeed, sir," said they both.

"And shall we not all try to live so as to have a sure hope of meeting each other in that beautiful home prepared for us from the foundation of the world, where we shall sit with all our loved Christian friends at the Saviour's feet, and sing the song of the redeemed?"

He held Harry and Lily by the hand as he asked them this; and turning to grandma he said, "And I believe, Grandma, that if aged Christians would oftener set a fresh, bright rosebud in their sombre ribbons, for the eyes of the children who look up to them, it would help instead of hindering the little ones on their journey to the heavenly land."

Lily and Harry accompanied Dr. Williston on his way as far as the creek. There he took the hill-path that led to a farmhouse he wished to visit, while they went happily on their way home.

CHAPTER VIII.

HARRY'S HOLIDAYS.

When Christmas time came around, there was an unwonted shadow hanging over Harry Percy's home. Grandma was very, very ill, and Mrs. Percy, wearied with anxious care and long watching, was well nigh exhausted. Mr. Percy was far away from home attending to important business, and faithful Louisa, the hired girl, found little time for anything beyond the burdens of each day, so that much of the care of baby fell on Lily, while to Harry was committed the whole charge of the barn and stable, and the necessary attention to the dumb animals on the place. Baby, who missed both mamma and grandma, found more opportunities for mischief than ever before, and vexed poor Lily daily until she cried. Never, thought Harry, had Louisa required half so many pails of water and barrows of wood as now, and never were there so many errands to be done.

To add to the general discomfort and perplexity, no preparations for Christmas cheer had been made. Poor Lily, who had hoped to make some little love gifts of her own fashioning, could not contrive to find a half hour in which to be alone; for baby cried whenever she shut the door of her room, and his noise disturbed poor grandma sadly. So, sorrowfully enough, she had given up all hope of contributing, even in her small way, to the holiday cheer. And Harry, now that papa came not from the city every night with basket or parcel, found chance for nothing but steady and necessary work for the general meal, and had no room in his busy brain for thought of extra effort.

One morning, when Mrs. Percy came down to breakfast looking paler and more troubled than usual, and sighed as she said, "Poor dears, you will have no holidays this year—at least no holiday pleasures." Lily and

Harry felt their hearts sink within them, and it was with great difficulty that they repressed their tears. But being sensible children, they understood how papa's long absence and grandma's painful illness had combined to cause them the loss of the accustomed holiday joys, and knew that their dear mother's heart felt keenly their disappointment; and they determined for her sake to bear it bravely. and to make no selfish complaints.

After his usual morning duties were all performed, Harry went to the stable to saddle Fleetfoot for his daily ride to the postoffice. As he was taking the harness from its hook in the barn, he thought he heard the sound of a sob. Listening a moment he felt sure that some one was weeping bitterly near by. Forgetting everything else he at once began to look around for the cause of the unusual sound, and soon discovered, crouching in the bottom of the sleigh, in the very farthest nook of the carriage house, poor Lily, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Lily Percy!" he exclaimed, "what are you doing here?"

Lily lifted her tear-stained face, and something like a smile was around her lips as she ceased crying to reply to her brother's superfluous inquiry in her own characteristic way: "I should think you could see what I 'm doing here; I 'm crying."

"What for?" asked Harry, no wise abashed by Lily's covert sarcasm. He was quite used to that.

"Because I 've *got* to," answered Lily emphatically. "My heart is broke with all this trouble, and I do n't want mamma to know; and I 've either got to mope and poke all through the holidays, or else have it all done with now. So there, go away and let me alone. Boys can whistle, and fling stones, and kick their boot-toes out, and do lots of things when they 're put out and plagued; but girls can't do anything but cry. Now go, and do n't come bothering here any more."

"Ho! ho! ha! ha!" How Harry did laugh

at the pitiful case made out by his mournful little sister. Not being a bad-hearted boy, however, he quickly, as he saddled Fleetfoot, offered her some bits of consolation.

"Never mind," he said, "I 'll give you a Christmas present, and a New Year's gift; and so 'll plenty of others, see if they do n't; and maybe something jolly will happen, after all." Then with a mischievous twinkle in his eye, he added, "Why do n't you try some of those prescriptions you 're always portioning out to me when I 'm up a tree, you know?"

"There you are talking slang again," interrupted Lily reproachfully. But Harry paid no heed. It was his turn now at prescribing, and he meant to improve his opportunity. "Say your catechism," he continued, "or some verses in the Bible. Or sing a hymn; 'When Hannah, pressed with grief,' for instance."

"Go away, you teasing boy," cried Lily, sobbing afresh. And Harry went, laughing merrily, as he cantered off upon Fleetfoot.

But his words remained behind, and the familiar lines of grandma's old hymn kept coming back to Lily, as she crouched and cried in the bottom of the sleigh,

> " When Hannah, pressed with grief,
>   Poured out her soul in prayer,
> She quickly found relief
>   Nor sought it vainly there."

And as Lily could not get rid of the words, she gradually fell to thinking seriously of them. Her sobs and tears ceased, and presently, she, like Hannah of old, sought relief from that sure source whence none ever sought in vain. When, a half hour later, she returned to the house, no traces of tears were on her face, and she set resolutely about bearing her cross of doing without holiday pleasures, for the sake of Him who " pleased not himself," and whose loving smile sanctifies even the weakest effort of his followers to tread the path he trod.

Mrs. Percy soon came into the nursery where Lily was engaged in amusing baby with his acrobats. Her face wore a glad smile. "Lily, dear," she said, "Aunt Lucy has sent for you and baby to spend the holidays with your cousins at Woodlawn. They are to have a tree, and a New Year's party. I am very glad for your sake, my child; and now, take the best care of baby while I pack your things. Your Uncle Fred will call for you this afternoon. Aunt Lucy agrees to relieve you entirely of the care of baby; and the little fellow loves Aunt Lucy so that I can feel content to have him with her."

How Lily's face shone. "O mamma!" was all she said in answer to the glad surprise. Her heart was too full for words. But when her mamma kissed her and left the room to prepare her for the jaunt, Lily murmured to herself, "I only asked God to make me quite willing to say, 'Thy will be done;' and to think how he has answered my prayer! Oh, I am too happy."

Just then Harry cantered up to the door with the mail matter. Mrs. Percy hastened to break the seals of her letters, and glance hastily over the contents of each. "Three separate invitations for Harry to spend his holidays," said she, "one from Cousin Will, one from Uncle and Aunt Blair, and one from Ned and Bert." These last were two city cousins who had visited Harry the previous summer, and had obtained Mrs. Percy's promise that he should return their visit during the winter, when the city was gay and attractive. "O dear!" cried Harry, as his mother read one after another of the cordial invitations; "what a pity a fellow could n't be three of himself. Which shall it be, mamma? Uncle Blair's, or Ned and Bert's? You know I can go to Cousin Will's any time. Let it be to Ned and Bert's, please."

He was fairly dancing with delight. Suddenly he sobered down. "I can't go to any of them," he said. "You could n't do without me, to feed, and water, and go errands. Pshaw! I wish I had n't got the invitations. There 's no use thinking about it." And poor Harry caught Fleetfoot by the forelock and turned away toward the stable, to hide the tears that would come.

"Poor boy," said his mother, and she stooped to pick up baby, that she too might conceal the gathering tears. Lily ran after Harry. It was her turn now to offer consolation. She did not advise him to say either catechism or prayers, nor even to sing

> "When Hannah, pressed with grief."

That would have been easy to do. She did instead something that was very, very hard for her.

"You *can* go, Harry," she said. "I 'll do your chores, and run the errands."

"*You!*" said Harry, a trifle scornfully. "I 'd like to see you cleaning the stable, and foddering the stock."

There were two cows, a yearling heifer, and a pretty bossy, besides a few goats and kids, that Harry delighted to designate as "the stock."

"Louisa could help me," suggested Lily meekly.

"And let the baby tumble into the soft soap barrel, likely as not, in the meantime," submitted Harry, with something of a sneer in his voice.

"Baby wont be here. He's going away this afternoon, to Aunt Lucy's for the holidays. Uncle Fred is coming for us. They're going to have a Christmas-tree, and a New Year's party, and Aunt Lucy is to take all the care of baby, and let me have a splendid time," began Lily.

"Well, how on earth then are you going to do so much choring and errand-running for me, I'd like to know?" asked Harry, interrupting her.

"I'm going to stay at home, and let you go to Ned and Bert's," said Lily. "I could manage very well, I know. It wont be so very hard for me either, because you see I'd got quite resigned and contented about staying at home, before Aunt Lucy sent. I took your advice about 'Hannah, pressed with grief,' you know: and I 'd made up my mind."

"You—little—*brick!*" said Harry, dashing away a tear, and in the exuberance of his appreciation, descending again to slang, for which Lily did not hesitate to rebuke him heartily.

"Well, I 'm not going to be outdone by a girl. You and baby just *go on.* *I'll* stay at home, and tend to my business like a man; and you need n't say a word to mamma about my caring. I *do n't* care so very much."

And for answer, Lily put her arms around Harry's neck, and hugged and hugged him. And so it was all happily settled.

CHAPTER IX.

LILY'S CHRISTMAS BLESSING.

When, just before leaving home for her holiday visit, Lily went to her grandma's room to bid the dear invalid "Good-by," she was touched by the words that grandma whispered to her at parting.

"God be with you, dear, and grant you a happy time. A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! And best of all, may He give you a true Christmas blessing, such as caused the wise men of the East to rejoice when they saw the Star. Do you know why they were so full of joy, dear?"

"I suppose," said Lily, "they were so glad because Christ was born."

"Yes," said grandma. "And that joy should be the sweetest and gladdest of all joys in every heart at Christmas time. God grant it may be yours, my child. Had Christ not come to be our Saviour, there could have been no joy in life worth having. The blessed thought of Christmas is, that

"'Christ once born in Bethlehem,
Is living now and here.'"

Uncle Fred was waiting at the door, and baby was calling and shouting for Lily to "Come, and go riding;" and the little girl could only press dear grandma's hand and promise her to ask for the Christmas blessing she so craved for her, before she was summoned by her mamma to enter the carriage, and be driven away across the prairies to Aunt Lucy's beautiful farm.

A great storm was gathering as Lily arrived at Woodlawn. Clouds were heaped up in the eastern sky; the wind blew in fitful gusts, and great flakes of snow came whirling down, first droppings of the feathery fall so soon to follow.

The merry young folks at Woodlawn were delighted with the prospect. A snowy

Christmas is full of delight to children who are favored with homes and home-comforts; and at Woodlawn there was ample comfort.

Great open fireplaces, with shining brass andirons heaped with burning hickory logs, gave out abundant light and heat. Aunt Lucy enjoyed wood-fires, and as Woodlawn comprised a tract of several hundred acres, many of which were covered with a heavy growth of timber, there was no scarcity of fuel.

All through the house went the merry children, racing and singing and chatting gayly of the many pleasures in store for them, when suddenly Bert cried out, "Oh, see the snow! It comes from all sides at once. How dark it grows! You can't even see the barn; It is just like those storms Uncle Ben told us of in the Scottish mountains."

"Saint Nicholas will get lost, and never find our house," said little Lucy dolefully. "Uncle Ben got lost in the mountains in a snow-storm."

Lucy wondered why the children laughed so merrily at what seemed to her such a dismal possibility, but her mind was soon turned from Saint Nicholas and his fate, by Aunt Lucy's remark, " My only fear is, that Selim may not be able to find the fat turkey that Aunt Becky wishes to dress for our Christmas dinner. Turkeys wander about and hide in such out-of-the-way places."

" Oh!" cried Lily, " *I* can find him; or at least he will be sure to find *me*. He always does find me when I have on this scarlet merino. I 'll run out to the barnyard, and he 'll chase me clear up to the kitchen-door. See if he does n't."

" She supposes turkeys can see better than folks," said Little Lucy. " It 's getting *awful* dark. Guess you 'll have to light the Christmas-tree right off."

But Aunt Lucy knew a better way of lighting up. She took the great poker and gently stirred the embers under the glowing logs in the fireplace, and in a moment the ruddy flames and crackling, snapping sparks went leaping and flashing up the wide chimney throat, and filled all the room with a brilliant light.

The children were shouting gleefully in the enjoyment of the pretty sight, when suddenly they were surprised by a violent ringing of the front-door bell. They ran into the hall just as the door was flung wide open, and through the entrance rushed, all together, a great gusty swirl of snowy blast, poor Lily on flying feet, and close at her heels the old turkey-cock with tail outspread, and every feather bristling with anger, while both wings flapped and beat viciously against the unlucky ankles of the wearer of the scarlet frock.

"Oh, do take him off!" screamed Lily, gasping between a sob and a laugh. "He caught me before I was ready for him. I just ran down the garden-walk and plumped right on him snuggled down under the pear-tree. My, but he was mad! I hardly knew which way to turn, and I guess I turned the wrong way after all, for I surely thought I was steering for the kitchen-door. Horrid old gobbler! Those wings of his hurt some. I do n't believe he has an amiable feather in his whole body."

In the general glee that followed Gobble was captured, and carried in triumph to the cook, while "Lily's Christmas Turkey Hunt" made a deal of sport for the merry boys.

All night and all the next day it snowed. The roads, the fences, the gate-posts, were heaped with the feathery flakes, and on Christmas Eve the storm was yet raging.

Aunt Lucy, true to her word, permitted the children to be in the room where stood the wonderful tree. She allowed each one to hang his or her gifts—carefully screened from view in fancy boxes—upon the branches; and when each child was brimful of happiness, Aunt Lilian led the little company in a sweet Christmas carol of love and praise to God for the gift of his dear Son, the blessed Lord of Christmas.

When Lily awoke at an early hour on Christmas morning, the storm was over, the sky was clear, and the stars were shining brightly. Lily wondered if one glowing star, whose clear rays seemed purer and steadier than the rest, might not have been that Christmas star whose holy rays led the wise men of the East as they journeyed toward the city of Bethlehem, where Christ the Lord was born. She thought of her grandma's kind words, and she repeated to herself the verse, " When they saw the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." Then kneeling at the bedside she offered her morning prayer with unwonted fervor, closing with the words " O Lord, please give me a Christmas blessing. Make me ever so happy this Christmas day, and may I be happy most of all, because Jesus has come to save me from my sins."

Soon after, the cousins were shouting and calling to her in the hall below, and as she bounded away to join the merry company assembled about the lovely, gift-laden Christmas-tree, her face shone, and her heart beat lightly with a sweet peace that underlaid all the merriment that found expression on her lips; for Lily had asked in faith, and received faith's sweet response.

The lights gleamed softly from the tapers on the Christmas-tree. The bells and balls and stars and clusters of ornaments glittered dazzlingly in the pleasant light. The fruits and flowers and merry good cheer of Christmas hung in tempting profusion from the tall tree's branches. It was a right royal tree, and the joy of the children was more than royal joy.

Before distributing the gifts Aunt Lucy read aloud the second chapter of St. Matthew's gospel, and all the happy band sang to sweetest music the beautiful carol,

"Ring, merry bells! ring, merry bells!
Christ, the Lord, is born."

And dear Aunt Lucy, as she laid each

pretty gift before its owner, said tenderly and affectionately, "A Christmas gift. May the dear Christ's blessing rest on both gift and giver. For the blessedness of Christmas is, that on this day God's best gift to mankind was made. We give our love-gifts to each other on this glad day, in memory of our blessed King, and in something of the loving spirit of our Father in heaven. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'"

So many were the gifts bestowed and received, and so absorbing was the interest, that the dinner-bell rang before all the presents had been sufficiently inspected. After due enjoyment of "Lily's turkey"—as the boys would call him—and feasting with merry zest upon the good cheer of Aunt Lucy's Christmas dinner, the children were invited to make ready for a grand sleigh-ride in Major Howard's new six-horse sleigh. Such happiness! The buoyant spirits of the happy lads and lasses, found vent in merry screams and clappings and shouts of joy, as they scampered off to find their various wrappings.

But Lily in her deeper joy had bliss too full for words. She stole away to her room and whispered a loving word of thankfulness to God. "For," said she, "I have got the true Christmas blessing. I am as happy as ever I can be; and most of all happy, because the Lord of Christmas is my Saviour and King."

CHAPTER X.

THE PARSONAGE DOVES.

THE happy holiday week was drawing to a close. New Year's Eve had come. On the day following New Year's Day, the children who were guests at Woodlawn must return to their homes.

"I would like to watch the old year out and the new year in," said Bert, as the children formed a large half-circle in front of the sittingroom fire after supper.

"Oh, so would I," said Lily. "I did so last year. We went to a watch-meeting; and just as the clock struck twelve all the congregation began the hymn,

"'Come, let us anew
Our journey pursue;
Roll round with the year,
And never stand still till the Master appear.'"

"Well, suppose we all sit up and sing it to-night when the clock strikes twelve," suggested Eva, who was impulsive and enthusiastic.

"How shall we keep awake?" asked Annie, who was practical in everything.

"Tell stories and play games," said Bob.

"Our stories are all stale," said Lily. "We 've told them over so often there is n't a bit of 'snap' left in them."

"Let 's get Aunt Lilian and Cousin Bessie to tell us some real, sure enough, nice stories," said Eva. "It 's New Year's Eve. They ought to be ever so amiably inclined."

"Good! good!" cried all the youngsters, and at once they ran to Aunt Lilian and begged permission to watch the old year out; and then began some pretty coaxing for stories.

Aunt Lilian proved quite coaxable, and promised a "good, long story, mostly about boys," on condition that Cousin Bessie should tell one of equal length about girls.

"I know just one," said Miss Bessie,

"and that is out of season. It is a Christmas story, and Christmas has just come and gone."

"Ah," cried Bert, "I've heard Judge Berry say that it was nine o'clock, according to law, until the clock struck ten. So, I reckon we may as well conclude that it is *this* Christmas until next Christmas comes."

"Anyway, it is holiday week," said Annie; "and Christmas times are holiday times, and therefore a Christmas story is not out of season during holiday week."

"Annie has won," said Cousin Bessie. "You shall have my story."

So, after spending some hours in various games, "The Muffin Man," "Blind Man's Buff," "Magic Music," and "Puss in a Corner," the children gathered about Aunt Lucy, and listened with eager ears to the story of

THE PARSONAGE DOVES.

The pastor was going to a Sunday-school convention. He was to be gone from home at least three days; and at Woodbine Parsonage the family arose with the dawn to have an early breakfast with papa, and to give him the good-by kisses when he should start away in his open buggy, with faithful Daisy in the shafts.

Often as this good pastor was called away from home on one or another tour of mercy or helpful duty, yet, somehow, the family never became *quite* used to it. That is, they never took it as a matter of course, and ceased to make any ado over the frequent exits and returns of the beloved father. There were always little extra attentions to the dear papa who had to "go away off:" fresh nut-cakes for his lunch; a nosegay for his button-hole; and most likely an orange, or a nickel's worth of peanuts to be slyly stuffed into his duster pocket by little Bobby; and oh! a never-ending lot of love and caresses, and charges to take care of himself, and not to stay long, and to be sure to write just the minute he got there.

This early morning, Mr. Ray, the pastor, being his own stable-boy, of course found it needful to devote some time to the care of faithful Daisy, who for so many years had carried him upon his ministerial itineracies.

The pastor's oldest son, a lad of ten years, could feed and harness Daisy quite well, but was not skilled in grooming, and could only look on while his father combed and brushed her glossy brown hair, and wish very hard that he were competent for the task.

"Don't you wish we could go, Jim?" said Master Georgie to the schoolmate who accompanied him home and had passed the night at the parsonage for the first time, and who now stood near him handing tufts of blue grass to patient Daisy who munched perseveringly, while the parson rubbed her sleek limbs. "We have such jolly times when we go with papa. He lets us get out and scare up quails, or gather nuts and persimmons, or anything there is; and drive! oh, my! why, he lets us drive most all the way, because he writes notes and things, and never bothers you at all if you keep in the road. Once I drove right smack into the middle of the creek; did n't see the bridge, because I was watching some geese going north, and Daisy wanted a drink, so she marched right square into the creek, and put down her head, and jerked the lines out of my hands, and—"

"And then did n't you catch a scolding though?" exclaimed Jim.

"No. Papa just laughed, and put his notes in his pocket, and backed her out, and said he guessed he'd drive a little way."

"Sho!" said Jim admiringly; "I'd like to go riding with him. If that had been me and my dad, I'd got a good whipping."

The minister was pouring a pail of fresh water into Daisy's trough as Jim said this; and he looked kindly but gravely at the little boy, and said, "'Honor thy father,' James, my boy. 'Dad' does not sound well from a child's mouth when speaking of his dear father. You have a *good* father, James. Be careful to obey him in all things. Now, you and George may run to the orchard, if you like, and fetch me a couple of peach switches, with a nice tuft of leaves at the top of each, to brush the flies from my good Daisy's back."

Just then a pure white dove, and one deeply mottled with dark color, came flying down from the cote, near the barn, and lit on the minister's shoulder. They were his daughter Nelly's favorite pets, who came at her call wherever they might be.

"Good morning, Pearl and Cloud," said Mr. Ray, as the pretty things cooed softly to him; then gently tossing one to Jim and one to George, he bade them take an airing in the orchard before asking to be fed.

But both doves nestled down in Jim's arms, and were carried by him to the orchard. When, a half hour later, the family gathered around the breakfast table, it was observed that George's guest was not with them. The bell was rung again, and Georgie went in search of him: but he was nowhere to be found. "He's full of tricks and capers," suggested Georgie. "He has hid somewhere to tease me, I guess."

So the bell was rung for the third time, and the breakfast was resumed, but no Jim made his appearance, either at breakfast or prayers. When the dear papa was fairly started on his journey, just as the rosy sunrise streamed full across the eastern sky, Nelly went out upon the vine-wreathed portico where she always fed her pets, and called her docile favorites.

"Where are you, Pearl and Cloud? Coo-o-o, coo-o-o, coo-o-o, dovies," but alas! not as usual did the pretty pets respond to their young mistress' gentle call. Nelly walked down the garden path toward the cotes, calling and cooing coaxingly, but in vain. The doves came not, and the cote was empty. Alarmed for the safety of her pets, Nelly hastened to the house. "My doves are gone," she exclaimed. "Georgie, did you see them when you were at the barn with papa?"

"Of course I did. Jim had em. He must have hid 'em. He stopped out by the fodder stack, when I carried the switches to the barn. That's the last I saw of him. I thought he'd gone in the house."

"He'll get tired of fasting, soon," said Mrs. Ray, "and will probably think it a poor time for his tricks."

"I don't like such tricks," said Nelly. "I shouldn't think he'd wish to plague me, for I'm sure I tried to make his visit pleasant. I know every one says he's a bad boy, but I tried to show him that I trusted him to be as good as any other boy, anyway."

"They're a bad lot, I tell you," said Georgie mischievously, as Nelly finished her remark in a tone not very inspiring to confidence in her good opinion of the *genus* boy. As the day wore away, and the doves came not, Georgie was despatched to Jim's house to make inquiries concerning them. Jim was sawing wood when Georgie found him.

"What made you slip off before breakfast? and what did you do with Nell's doves?" cried Georgie.

"Nelly's doves!" echoed Jim: "Why, I left them in the barn; at least they flew in there just after you took in the switches—"

"Oh! that's very likely," interrupted Georgie. "We thought you'd hid them just for fun; but if you say *that*—pshaw! I did n't think you were mean enough *to steal*," added Georgie with stinging emphasis.

"*Steal!*" cried Jim, turning very red. "What do you mean? Do you think I'd come to see you, and stay all night, and then steal your sister's doves?"

"Yes, I do," said Georgie bluntly. "The doves are gone, and you had them. Why did you sneak off before breakfast, if you was n't up to some meanness? Everybody knows you're a bad boy, but *we* did n't suppose you were a *thief!*" and Georgie marched off in a spasm of righteous indignation, leaving poor Jim trembling with anger and shame.

"She was so good to me, and she thinks I stole her doves," he said to himself, choking back a sob. "There's no more use trying;" and bad, mischievous Jim sat down on the saw-horse and cried like a girl.

"There's no use," he said dejectedly, after the first burst of grief had spent itself. "I thought I'd try to be a good boy, and I hurried home to saw this wood that father told me to do yesterday. They were all so kind to me, and the minister told me always to obey father, and I thought I'd begin right then, and not wait for my breakfast; and this is what comes of it. They'll never believe me. They'll just think I am a sneak thief."

Poor Jim! For the next two days he was wretched enough. He imagined that every one in the village knew of the circumstances of the loss of the parsonage doves, and believed that he had stolen them.

Then, as time wore on, and no one spoke to him of it, he almost wished that some one *would*, for it seemed as if no one noticed him at all. The fact was that Mrs. Ray had forbidden Georgie to speak of the loss, or to cast any suspicion upon Jim, so that no one knew of it. And the reason why no one noticed Jim was because not having the heart to perpetrate his usual amount of mischief, he failed to draw the notice to himself.

It was with a heavy heart that the poor boy espied the minister's buggy, and Daisy trotting briskly in the shafts, approaching the lane that led to Woodbine parsonage.

"He'll know it all in a minute," said Jim to himself. "He'll think I'm a thief. I might as well *be* one. Just as I was trying to be good too! It's too hard!" And Jim laid his head down on the garden gate, and the tears would come. An hour later he was startled by the hearty tones of Georgie Ray.

"Hallo, Jim! You're all right! Nelly says she never thought you took them, and she knows you're noble enough to forgive me for saying you hooked the doves. Come on; ask your mother to let you come up with me to buy a gallon of molasses. We're going to have a candy-pulling, and papa says you must come back and get your breakfast with him. Come on: Nell's out on the portico now, feeding them. She's gay!"

"Where were the doves?" asked Jim.

"Oh! where do you reckon?" laughed Georgie. "You know the box under the buggy seat? Well, when papa came home, there was a nut or something loose, and he wanted the monkey-wrench to fix it with; and so I got off the cushions and whipped up the cover of the box—he always keeps the wrench in the box—and out flew the doves, half starved and nearly crazy for a drink, and looking like a pair o' lunatics. Oh! you ought to see how Cloud *does* look—just like a sick buzzard. There was a little oats in the box, or else they'd have died. Papa saw them fly in there when I ran out of the barn, but he supposed they'd gone out again; so he tossed the cover and cushions on, and never thought another word about it. I wonder he never heard the poor little things cooing and mourning. Wasn't it funny, though?"

"Not for me," said Jim, a little gloomily. "Nor for the doves either," he added more cheerfully. "But I'm very glad they're found. I'll ask mother to let me go. I'm glad I sawed all my wood, so that I can stay to breakfast."

Such a rejoicing as there was at Woodbine parsonage that night! Pastor Ray laughed and capered and pulled candy as merrily as any of them; and Nelly was so gay and gracious that the happy-hearted Jim felt nearer to paradise than he ever in the whole course of his mischievous life had felt before.

When he told how he had suffered on account of the loss of the doves, and his fears lest every one would think him a thief, Georgie exclaimed,

"You may thank mother and Nell that

they didn't. Nell would not think any bad thoughts of you, and mother wouldn't let me say mine; but how could a fellow ever think of the doves going off to a Sunday-school convention along with the minister?"

And when the glee that followed Georgie's words had subsided, the minister said,

"I am thankful that my little boy was prevented by his mother's and his sister's sweet charity from working any ill to his neighbor, who is, I trust, desirous of becoming a true and noble Christian lad, and a blessing to all of us. And to aid him, and all other aspiring boys to conquer in all their battles with the great enemy, let us pattern after our dear mother and little Nelly, for they have remembered the words of the Lord Jesus, 'Be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.'"

"Is that all?" asked Eva, as Aunt Lucy paused.

"Yes, dear. Is it not enough? It has taken me quite a while to tell it."

"Oh, it is a very nice story," said Lily, "and it turns out just right. Most stories make the boys turn square round and act oh, so perfectly, all at once. I guess Jim cut capers many a time after he got over his scare about the doves. I do n't believe he ever got so gloomy you could n't live in the house with him. I hope he did n't, anyway."

"Is Harry that way?" asked Bert slyly.

Lily colored. "Harry is a good boy," she said earnestly. "If he had n't been, I could n't have been here now. He gave up his visit so that I could come here. But he teases sometimes—a little bit. And he cuts capers. It would be dull at our house sometimes if he was n't there. I guess he 's just about the right kind of a boy generally for a brother."

Cousin Bessie smiled at Lily's hearty commendation of Harry. "I like to hear your good word for the absent one," she said. "And I am glad that you do not forget your brother's kind act in giving the preference to his sister in the matter of the holiday visit. I think Harry has shown that he understands the practical meaning of that Scripture that exhorts us to 'Be kindly affectioned one to another, in honor preferring one another.'"

"Harry is never selfish," said Lily. "If he would n't tease, and talk slang, he 'd be almost perfect." And then, with a pretty touch of human nature, the honest little girl continued, "But I suppose it 's just as well he has some faults, for I might n't like him half as well if he had n't any."

"I used to think you despised Harry and the whole lot of us," said Dave. "You used to be everlastingly coming down on us so for every little slip we made. I guess *you* are n't quite so heavenly minded as you used to be. Are you?"

"Heavenly minded?" echoed Eva, in surprise.

"Well, no," said Dave, "not that exactly, but high and holy, like the Pharisees, you know. I used to think she was regular born kin to that old party that stood up in the temple and thanked God he was n't as other men, and all that."

Lily blushed. "Maybe I *was* like him," she replied. "I now try to be like the other person mentioned in that parable." Then with a rougish smile, she added, "But 'old party' is slang, all the same. And slang is unbecoming."

"Yes," said Dave, "and you are n't a bit Pharisaical these days, and I do n't care now if you do come down on me. You have a better way with you now about it. I like you 'lots and pastures' better'n I used to. I should n't wonder if I liked you first-rate now."

Then when the merry laugh at Dave's enthusiastic profession of regard had subsided, Cousin Bessie began her story of "The Christmas Necklace."

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHRISTMAS NECKLACE.

EVER since May Leslie could remember anything, she remembered with pleasure the bright and glittering necklace of real gold beads that encircled the graceful throat of her favorite auntie.

When she was a wee, toddling baby she had reached her tiny fingers after the shining globules, and crooned and cooed in her most fascinating baby-fashion, to the bright trinkets, which, had she succeeded in detaching them from the fondling auntie's neck she would have swallowed, most probably, one by one, as long as the beads and her digestion lasted. As she grew older her admiration for the glittering necklace did not in the least abate; and her greatest delight was to have the silken cord that held the yellow spheres tied round her neck, for "just one teenty minute."

May's aunt was an agreeable young woman, fond of her many brothers and their several families of engaging little prattlers, who in their turn were always glad to welcome dear story-telling Aunt Madge to their household circles.

When May was about ten years old her aunt came to spend the holiday with the family of her brother Ben, May's father. Before she had been an hour in the house May contrived to whisper quite confidentially, "Wont you let me wear your gold beads just a minute this evening, Aunt Madge? Cousin Del is coming to stay all night, and I *would* like them just a little teenty tonty minute."

And the kind auntie had answered in an equally confidential manner, "Yes. All the evening. And I 'll tell you and Del a story of blessed Christmas besides, if you 'll coax papa to build a fire in the boys' room. I can't tell this story by an old black stove.

It needs hickory logs, and heaped up, bright coals, and apples toasting on a string, and chestnuts and popcorn popping on the hearth; for it is a story of the dear old-fashioned times."

May fairly screamed. If there was one thing more delightful to her than any and all others, it was a "boys' room" fire. The room itself was a long, low-ceiled apartment over the diningroom. The floor was covered with rag-carpet, and furnished with the oldest-fashioned furniture. Such a lofty, mahogany bedstead, with a pineapple on the tip of each post! Such claw-footed, brass-ringed bureaus and stands! Such a square, stiff-backed settle! And under the broad mantel-shelf, oh! such a crowning glory of a fireplace!

The room was usually warmed in winter by a pipe that came through the floor from the stove below: but on rare occasions the great fireplace was filled with dry hickory-wood from the well-seasoned "boys' room pile."

Not that there were any boys in the family of Mr. Benjamin Leslie. Oh, no! Little May was the only child of the household. But the brothers—Mr. Benjamin's and Miss Madge's eight brothers, who were scattered far and wide indeed, but who came at odd times, by twos and pairs to visit the old homestead, and to spend a night or two in the room—all remembered it with a tender affection as the nursery of their childhood, and in later years as the free-and-easy den, sanctum, and asylum, all in one, of their whole boyish band. They had all gone away from it, but it would always be "the boys' room." Mr. Ben kept a woodpile for the old fireplace, and I think he was quite right, when he said this Christmas Eve, as he built the noble fire, that sister Madge enjoyed the quaint comfort of the dear old room as keenly as did any of the boys. And so it chanced that upon Christmas Eve there was a glorious fire in the boys' room, and May and Del, supplied with strings and apples and chestnuts and popcorn, wheeled up the old high-backed settle and nestled beside Aunt Madge, who, with bright eyes grown strangely dreamful, watched the leaping flames dart up the broad chimney, and thought of happy Christmas eves so long gone by.

"Oh!" cried Del, quivering with delight, "to-morrow will be Merry Christmas!"

"Aunt Madge said 'Blessed Christmas,' when she lent me the beads," whispered May.

"Yes," said Aunt Madge, smiling upon the little maids. "I was just thinking of it. Dear Aunt Jane's blessed Christmas."

"Who was Aunt Jane?" asked May; "my Aunt Jennie?"

"Oh, no," answered her auntie. "Nobody knew who she was. But let me tell my story properly; and to do that I shall have to go away back, years before you were born—or I either, for that matter—"

"Oh, how funny!" laughed Del; but Aunt Madge went on without stopping.

"To the days of which I have so often

heard my dear mother tell, when Leslieville was only a little village, in which everybody knew everybody else, and happy homes were scattered all up and down the grassy lands that now are paved streets. Into this quiet village, one sunny morning in May, came the stage from the West. The driver wound his horn and reined up his horses in front of the tavern-porch, threw off the great mail-bag, and then tossing the lines to the stable-boy, leaped from the high box, and opening the coach door with a 'Here we are, ma'am; Leslieville tavern, ma'am,' proceeded to assist his solitary passenger to alight.

"In a few days it was noised around that the passenger was a person from a distant state, who had come to settle in Leslieville, and had bought the Ellis cottage, and ordered furniture for it from the village cabinet-maker. In a small community every bit of news is thoroughly discussed, and you may be sure that the event of the new-comer's arrival and intentions did not escape its share of village gossip. But in the weeks in which the stranger was occupied with fitting up her home, no one had discovered any more about her than that she bought and paid for her little property, and that she intended to live and to earn her living in Leslieville, and that her name was Jane Carmany.

" So, gradually the wonderment, for want of nourishment, died away, and the newcomer, being a good sewer, quilter, and knitter, obtained plenty of work, and was no longer annoyed by curious questions; for the village people, as if in return for her reticence, seemed to have agreed upon giving her a thorough letting-alone; no one went near her, unless to take or receive a parcel of work. How long she would have lived this solitary life I know not, had it not chanced that your grandma, then a young and merry mother of only five boys, desired greatly to go on a journey to her childhood's home, and was troubled about what disposition to make of her house and home-affairs, and her noisy, romping boys. She had met Aunt Jane only on Sundays at church; she had spoken, in her kind, cheery way, calling her 'sister,' the first time she had met her; but she had never called upon her. She concluded to do so now, and forthwith put on her bonnet and went to see her neighbor.

"'Good-morning, Sister Carmany,' she said, as she put her smiling face in at the open door, on which she had lightly tapped. 'I hope you are glad to see me, if I am rather late in making you a visit of welcome.'

"Aunt Jane replied civilly if not very cordially, as she handed a chair and invited her guest to be seated, 'I suppose you have not needed work before.'

"'Oh, I have not brought work,' my mother hastened to explain; 'but I have come on a selfish errand all the same. I have thought it possible that you might be induced to come and take charge of my house for a few weeks, while I go on a visit to my mother. There are five boys, my husband,

and the help, all to be looked after. Nancy and Tom, the help, will do their parts well enough. The judge, my husband, is not the least trouble in the world; but he does not know how to attend to the boys. And, in fact, I could n't think of leaving either him or them without some good, kind person to look after them, to be a mother to them while I 'm away from them.'

"My mother said that Aunt Jane looked keenly at her while she was speaking, and as she concluded said, 'And how do you know, silly little mother, that I am a good, kind person?'

"'Oh,' replied my honest little mother, 'I do n't, of course, *know* anything of the sort; but I 'm quite willing to trust you. Why should I not be?'

"'Why, indeed?' asked Sister Carmany in a dreamy tone, and then added in a kind voice, 'Yes, dear, I 'll come, and I do n't doubt that I shall get on very well.'

"And come she did. My mother went

to Maine, and Aunt Jane ruled the house in her absence. It was during this visit that Sister Carmany obtained from my brothers the title that clung to her to her dying day—'Aunt Jane.' From that time forth her position in Leslieville was assured. She nursed the sick; kept house for the mother who longed for a respite among her kindred far away; helped at the weddings and funerals, and in time came to be considered an indispensable aid and comfort, in times of emergency, to all the households of Leslieville. When I came, the last of the merry band of ten children that made the old homestead riotous with childish glee, there were nine boys in the family, and Aunt Jane loved them all; and she loved me. She was by no means young when she came to Leslieville, and as a score of years went by, and her step grew more languid, people said, 'Aunt Jane is failing;' but we children did not notice it.

"When I was about ten years of age, we were to have a Christmas-tree at our house, and all the cousins were to be with us on Christmas Eve. Aunt Jane had been helping mother for some weeks previous to the holidays, and had gone home for a few days, expecting to return to us on Christmas day. Mother went down to see her on the morning of the day before Christmas. When she returned, she told us that Aunt Jane was not very well, and that she wished very much that it were possible for me to pass the night with her.

" 'She seems quite anxious about it,' said my mother,'although she knows it is useless to expect Madge to-night, when all the merry-making is to be going on.'

" 'Madge is Aunt Jane's pet,' shouted my brothers. 'She 'll get a nice Christmas-present from her.'

" 'Aunt Jane has her heart quite set on Madge,' said my mother.

"At another time I should have felt pleased at these words, but now they troubled me. Dear Aunt Jane, who always came to me if I was sick! To think of her alone and ill, and longing for loving companionship in vain, on Christmas Eve. I thought of a hundred little kindnesses Aunt Jane had shown me. The pretty, blue merino frock that hung across the foot of the bed ready for my evening toilet, seemed to reproach me with my selfishness; for had not Aunt Jane diligently sewed on it that I might be happy in it?

"'If you'll send some of the boys after me, mother,' I said, 'I'll go and stay with Aunt Jane till supper-time.'

"My mother agreed to this, and I put on my hooded cape and hastened to the cottage. Aunt Jane sat by her bright fire, knitting, as I put my head in at the sittingroom door. 'Bless the dear child,' she exclaimed in a pleased voice; 'did she think so much of Aunt Jane as to leave the cousins and the tree, and the Christmas supper, to cheer the old woman's lonely fireside? Bless your sweet face, you shall have a nice supper, and shall hang up your stockings at Aunt Jane's chimney; and wont we be happy, dearie?'

"She thought I had come to pass the night with her. How could I tell her otherwise, and disappoint her loving heart? I believe it to have been the purest and noblest act of my early life, that I hung up my cloak and said, as if no dear pleasure lay cold and dead in my young bosom, 'We'll have fine times, Aunt Jane; and I'll be sure to wake up first in the morning, and wish you a merry Christmas.'

"She looked at me with such a sweet content beaming from her face, and said, 'Not *merry* Christmas, dear, but *blessed* Christmas. Yes, Madge, if you're waking first, kiss me and wish me a blessed Christmas.'

"And then she bade me lay the small, round table for our supper—she knew it used to give me such pleasure to do this for her—and she directed me how to make the chocolate, and where to find the dainties, and to toast the slices, and to poach the eggs; and last of all, gave me the key of her treasure-chest, and sent me for her silver cream-jug and sugar-tongs. When I returned with these, she had adorned the table with a loaf of frosted cake, and a glass dish of sliced oranges. The boys came for me just as we were sitting down to it. They brought a pail of hot oyster-soup and some celery for Aunt Jane. I was adroit enough to prevent them from betraying my intention of returning with them, and I managed to give Ben to understand that he must tell mother and the cousins that I ought to stay with Aunt Jane; she was not well enough to be left entirely alone, and that she wanted me to stay.

"How relieved I felt when I had fairly disposed of those boys! Such a happy time as Aunt Jane and I had at our little feast! I do not remember that she talked or ate much, but I know that I did both. Then I washed and wiped the tea-things, and brought a pail of water, tidied the hearth, and filled the fireplace with smooth, round sticks, and found the place in the large Bible.

"Then we sat down to prayers. Aunt Jane and I read a verse by turn, of the lovely Christmas chapter, and we knelt together as she prayed the Lord of Christmas to come and live in our hearts. She kissed me 'Good-night,' and tucked me in the soft, warm bed, and I fell asleep, while yet she lingered at the fireside, reading the pages of the blessed book. I woke once in the night, and saw her still sitting at the table. She was singing in a low, clear voice, a verse of an old hymn:

"'Firm as a rock his promise stands,
And he can well secure
What I've committed to his hands,
Till the decisive hour.'

"'Is it blessed Christmas yet, Aunt Jane?' I asked. She turned towards me with a smile and answered, 'Blessed Christmas;' and then bowed her head upon the table, I supposed, to breathe a 'Good-night' prayer; and again I dropped into the sound sleep of childhood.

"When I awoke the sun was shining full

in the window. Aunt Jane was sitting with bowed head at the little table. I sprang out of bed and called out gleefully, 'Blessed Christmas, Aunt Jane. I wish you a blessed Christmas!' and ran and touched her hand. It was icy cold! I started back in alarm. As I did so my eyes fell on my stockings. They were full, and from one of them a little slip of paper was depending.

"'Aunt Jane!' I cried, 'wake up! See my stockings! They are brimful!'

"But there was no response or movement. In terror I ran to the street-door and cried to the neighbors across the way. They came in answer to my summons. One of the women emptied my stockings upon the tea-tray, and drew them on my chilled feet, and hastily dressed me and sent me home for my mother.

"'Aunt Jane is with the Lord,' she said, as she tried to soothe me, for I was crying bitterly. 'It is indeed a blessed day for her. Do not cry, Madge. Here is a note she has left for you. It was pinned on your stocking. I will take care of your presents for you, and one of your brothers can come for them.'

"I ran home with the sad tidings, and my mother, taking Ben with her, went at once to the cottage. I remember that I cried almost all the morning, and could not listen to the boys' account of the merry-making of the night before. When my mother returned home, in time to assist at the spreading of the Christmas dinner-table, I wondered that she could go about so cheerfully. Ben brought me the little covered basket. 'Aunt Jane's Christmas gifts to you,' he said. I opened it, and drew forth its now to me sacred contents. A lovely white apron, with ruffled pockets; soft, warm mittens, stockings, and a comfort, of Aunt Jane's own knitting; a few yards of rare, old lace, marked, 'For Madge's wedding-gown'—I have it yet; six silver teaspoons, the pretty cream-jug and sugar-tongs, and this necklace of gold beads."

"Ah," said May, "what lovely Christmas presents."

"My mother said that Aunt Jane had left a copy of her will lying between the pages of her open Bible. In it she had remembered all her friends. Her personal property she had divided up into love-tokens for each. Her cottage she had left to a poor widow who had lately lost her son—her only dependence—and who, in better days, had been a stanch friend of Aunt Jane. But for this provision she would have been thrown upon the charities of the village."

"What was in your note?" asked Del.

"I forgot all about my note, until my mother mentioned the will. Then I drew it from my pocket. It ran thus:

"'DEAR LITTLE MADGE: Be very happy when you tie this necklace around your throat. It is Aunt Jane's most valued earthly treasure. Wear it for my sake, as I have always worn it for the sake of one whom I shall soon greet in heaven. I had thought never to part with these gold beads, but to wear them to my grave. I loose them from the neck they have encircled for forty years, to give them as a last love-token to the dear child who gave up her own merry Christmas, that she might add to the happiness of a lonely old woman. I give them with my blessing, and may the mercy of the Lord of Christmas add to it the blessing that maketh rich and He addeth no sorrow therewith.'

"I can never tell how glad I was that I had neither selfishly remained at home, nor returned to the merry-making. I cried to think how Aunt Jane might have spent her last Christmas eve on earth in disappointed solitude. I went to my room, and holding the precious beads in my fingers, I prayed the Lord to help me by this gift, to remember always to live, caring more for others' happiness than for my own. I truly believe that these gold beads were blessed to me, and became a constant unselfish reminder; for whenever in all my life I have been tempted to please myself at some cost to another, I have seemed to feel the gentle pressure of the necklace at my throat, and I recall that blessed Christmas and my childish prayer; and by its memories I am helped and strengthened to deny myself.

"Christmas is the time above all others, when we should think much of Him who 'pleased not himself;' and she who wears upon her heart a rosary of unselfish thoughts will find this sweetest and most gracious day of all the year not only a gladsome holiday, but in very truth a holy day—a blessed Christmas."

"Is that all the story?" asked May, as Aunt Madge paused.

"All there is *to be told*, dear. There may be somewhat for you to think out for yourselves to-morrow."

And then, the bright coals glowing cheerfully on the hearth, the little girls hung up the apples, and popped their corn and chestnuts with a right good will, until bedtime. In the morning they were overjoyed to find among their gifts two lovely necklaces of alabaster beads, with a locket attached to each. Upon a slip of paper which enclosed each beautiful present, was written in Aunt Madge's fair script,

"A Christmas Necklace."

'Ah!" said Del, as she clasped the necklace round her throat, "I know now what there was for us 'to think out' of the story of blessed Christmas. Auntie meant that we should have something to help us to remember to live for others instead of for ourselves."

"Yes," said May, "it must be that." Then in a low voice she added, "Come, Del, let us do as auntie did. Let us go and ask the Lord of Christmas to bless our Christmas necklaces."

CHAPTER XII.

HAPPY NEW YEAR.

The clock on the mantel showed that in five minutes more the New Year would be begun.

"Let us spend these last few moments of the year in prayer," said Aunt Lucy gently.

They knelt. There was a moment spent in silent prayer, and then Aunt Lucy led them in an earnest plea to God for a special blessing upon every member of the worshipping circle, that this year so soon to dawn upon them might prove not only a happy New Year, but a new year blessed with a heavenly grace, the beginning of a life of greater love and consecration to the service of the King.

All together, at the close of Aunt Lucy's petition, they repeated the Lord's Prayer, and while the "Amen" was yet upon their lips, the silvery-toned clock rang out the old year's knell. And with cheerful voices they sang the New Year's hymn.

Come let us anew
Our journey pursue,
Roll round with the year
And never stand still till the Master appear.
His adorable will
Let us gladly fulfil
And our talents improve,
With the patience of hope, and the labor of love.

Our life is a dream;
Our time, as a stream,
Rolls quickly away;
The fugitive moment refuses to stay.
The arrow is flown—
Man's life it is gone—
The millennial year
Rushes on to our view, and eternity's here.

Oh, that each in the day
Of His coming may say,
"I have fought my way through,
I have finished the work thou didst give me to do."
Oh, that each from his Lord
May receive the glad word,
"Well and faithfully done,
Enter into my joy, and sit down on my throne."

"I wish you all a happy New Year," said Aunt Lucy cheerily. "And I wish you, as my best desire, the realization of the blessing expressed in the hymn you have just sung. Time is short. Eternity will soon be here. 'Choose you this day whom you will serve.'"

There were tears in Aunt Lucy's eyes, though a smile was on her lips as she urged her affectionate appeal. Lily's voice trembled, but she looked sweetly up into Aunt Lucy's face, and said, "Thank you, Aunt Lucy; and I wish you, and all of us a happy New Year. And I have already chosen."

"And so have I," said Eva. "And I wish you all a happy, happy New Year. I made up my mind while Aunt Lucy was praying. I mean to be a Christian. Boys, if I do n't act like one, from this time on, you must remind me—and—pray for me. Wont you?"

Bert and Ben and Dave looked very sober.

"I guess I 'd better be one myself, before I go to praying for other folks," at length said Dave.

"*Do* be one, Dave dear," whispered Cousin Bessie.

"Well, I'll try, any way," said Dave, glancing at Lily. "Lily's a sight more agreeable than she used to be. She acts like a Christian about every little thing too."

"And we'll help one another," added Ben brightly. And there was joy at Woodlawn in the dawn of that happy New Year's morning; joy in heaven, among the angels of God too, we doubt not, for some at least of the dear children had heard the call of the children's Friend, and answered, as may each reader of this little book answer to the gracious call: "Lord, here am I."

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